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# PC PowerPlay

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ISSUE  
#246

DECEMBER  
2015







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## ON THE COVER

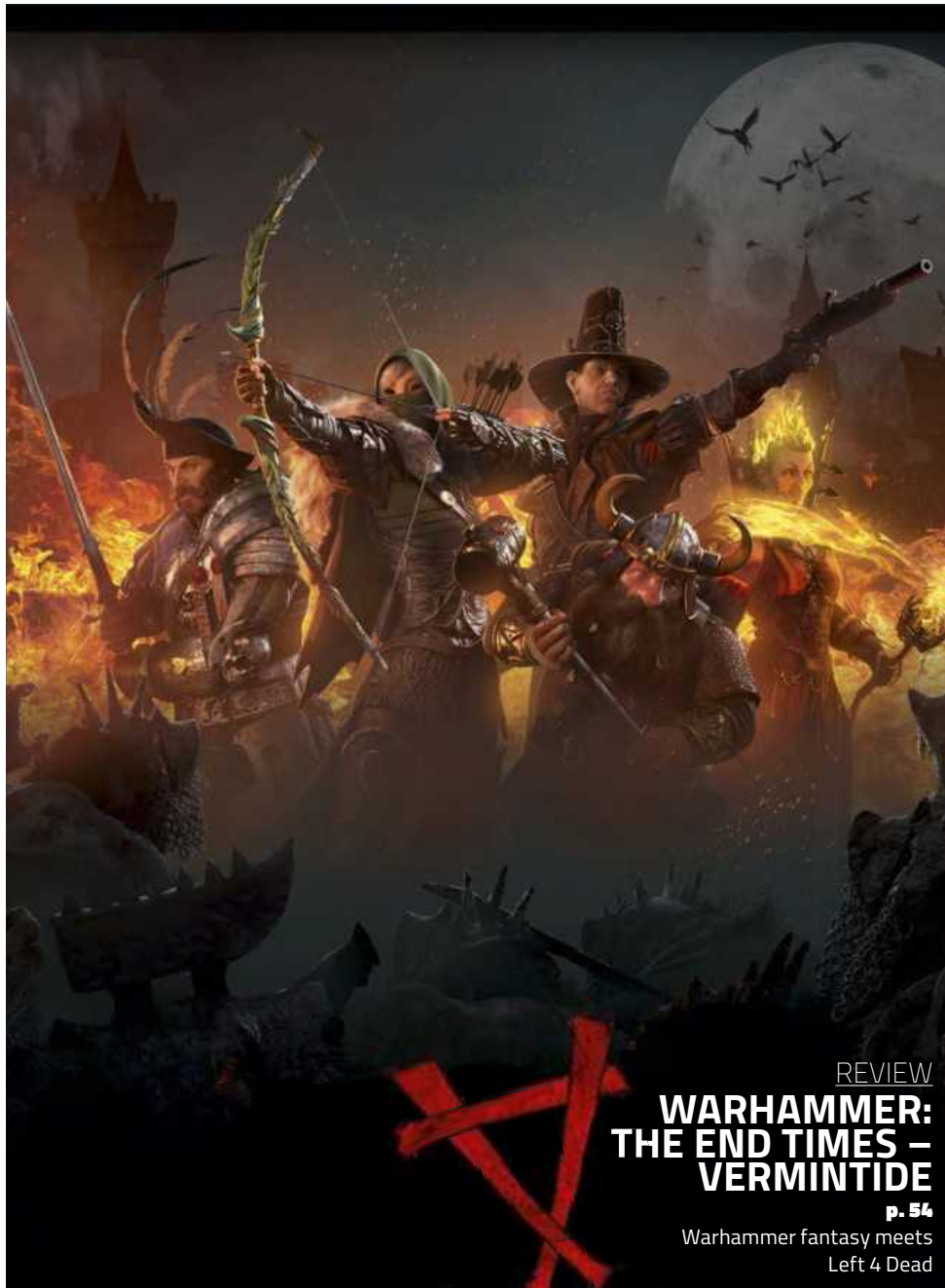
### BATTLEBORN

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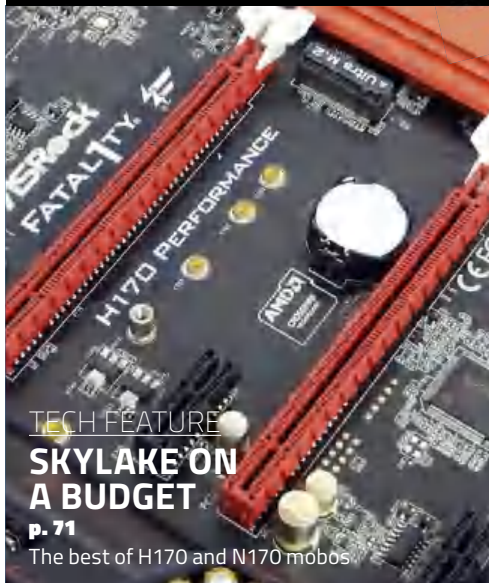
Gearbox tackles both co-op and competitive multiplayer in spectacular style







REVIEW  
**WARHAMMER:  
THE END TIMES –  
VERMINTIDE**  
p. 54  
Warhammer fantasy meets  
Left 4 Dead



TECH FEATURE  
**SKYLAKE ON  
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The best of H170 and N170 mobos



TECH  
**RADEON R9 NANO**  
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Small and silent, but deadly

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## CON JOB

By necessity I write my editorials at the end of a production cycle so I can talk about the important events or themes of the production cycle, but thanks the workload I'm sometimes not my best self when I sit down to write my final words for the magazine. Not this month. Although I'm physically exhausted, I'm mentally, hell, even spiritually (in the keeping spirits up, not supernatural way) enervated thanks to the last weekend in October. That weekend was, of course, PAX.

I'm not usually one for crowds, preferring solitude to the press of people, but the crowds I've experienced every year at PAX have been great thanks to a shared love of all things gaming and a willingness to wear their loves on their collective sleeves, whether it be through cosplay, nerd t-shirts or just open enthusiasm for games, merchandise, figurines, comics, developers and what have you. Rather than sucking the air out of a room, the PAX crowd enlivens it. It's hard to be jaded around all that happiness. It's loud, chaotic, hot and not just a little bit fragrant – things I usually hate – but hang me, I love it. My feet don't, and my back is killing me, but that's another story.

As always, the highlight of PAX was the indies. Even though there was hushed talk of the possibility of an "Indie-pocalypse" thanks to the fact that it's getting harder to make a profit on indie titles, the level of talent on show was astonishing. Over the next few months we'll (and by "we" I mean Meghann, our resident Indie writer) will be taking a deeper look at some of the best games from the Indie stands. I'm definitely curious to see if her favourites line up with mine.

Daniel Wilks  
Editor  
@drwilkenstein



## QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"Smells like Old Spice and bum"

"Oh no! My boob silicone has just burst!"

"I'll have a shot with them and swap around the beaver"

## PC PowerPlay

### EDITORIAL

**EDITOR** Daniel Wilks

[dwilks@nextmedia.com.au](mailto:dwilks@nextmedia.com.au)

**GROUP ART DIRECTOR** Malcolm Campbell  
[mcampbell@nextmedia.com.au](mailto:mcampbell@nextmedia.com.au)

**TECH EDITOR** Bennett Ring  
[bennett@internode.on.net](mailto:bennett@internode.on.net)

**SPACE LORD** Ben Mansill  
[bmansill@nextmedia.com.au](mailto:bmansill@nextmedia.com.au)

**INTERN** Nathan Davies

### CONTRIBUTORS

James Cotte, Alex Mann, Terrence Jarrad, Meghann O'Neill, Josh Lundberg, Jordy Bertram, Theo, Morte, Nathan Lawrence, Dan Staines, Dave Kozicki, Joab Gilroy, Katie Williams, Heidi Kemps, Patrick Stafford, Ashley McKinnon, John Robertson, Hasan Ali Almami

### ADVERTISING

**GROUP NATIONAL ADVERTISING MANAGER**  
**GAMING**

Cameron Ferris

[cferris@nextmedia.com.au](mailto:cferris@nextmedia.com.au)

☎ (+16 2) 02 9901 6348

M: 0405 356 419

### ACCOUNT MANAGER

Sean Fletcher

[sfletcher@nextmedia.com.au](mailto:sfletcher@nextmedia.com.au)

☎ (+16 2) 02 9901 6367

M: 0402 585 124

### ADVERTISING TRAFFIC

Alison Begg

[abegg@nextmedia.com.au](mailto:abegg@nextmedia.com.au)

☎ 02 9901 6346

**PRODUCTION MANAGER** Alison Begg

**CIRCULATION DIRECTOR** Carole Jones

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

[www.mymagazines.com.au](http://www.mymagazines.com.au)

**TOLL FREE ☎ 1300 361 146**

Locked Bag 3355, St Leonards NSW 1590

### COVER DISC ENQUIRIES:

[dwilks@nextmedia.com.au](mailto:dwilks@nextmedia.com.au)

☎ 02 9901 6100

**nextmedia**

Building A, Level 6

207 Pacific Highway

St Leonards, NSW 2065

Locked Bag 5555,

St Leonards, NSW 1590

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

David Gardiner

**COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR**

Bruce Duncan

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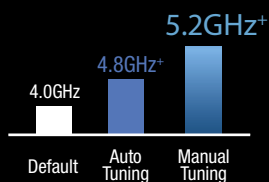
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\*Testing configuration: Intel LGA1151 i7 6700K | Z170-DELUXE | DDR4 G.Skill 3400C16 | ENERMAX 1050W | Corsair H100i | Intel SSD 80G | Win 8.1

GTX950-OC-2GD5 | 2GB GDDR5 | 1279 MHz Boost Block in OC Mode | 6610 MHz Memory Clock  
\*Performance will vary by system configuration and usage.



## THIS MONTH...



**DANIEL WILKS**  
Avoided the PAX Pox  
@drwilkenstein



**MALCOLM CAMPBELL**  
Made million of  
magazines



**BENNETT RING**  
Lost his internets  
@bennettring



**JAMES COTTEE**  
Dressed as robot  
Frankenstein  
@j\_cottee



**MEGHANN O'NEILL**  
Saw 82 Indie games  
@firkraags



**JAMES O'CONNOR**  
Talked about his thesis  
@jickle



**BEN MANSILL**  
Felt KFC regret



**NATHAN LAWRENCE**  
Grew an even bigger  
beard



**HEIDI KEMPS**  
Hopefully got paid



**DAVID HOLLINGWORTH**  
Went hands off



**ALEX MANN**  
Monitored Facebook



**CAMERON FERRIS**  
Wanted a break  
@pcpowerplay



**SEAN FLETCHER**  
Left PAX early

# FRONTEND



## INTERVIEW

### 24 Kingdom Come: Deliverance

Prepare yourself for realistic medieval combat



## PREVIEW

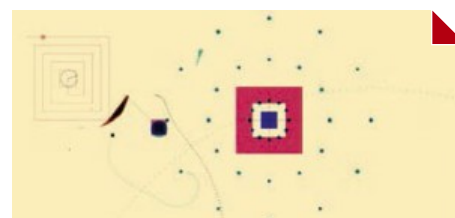
### 44 Battleborn

Hands on with the newly revealed competitive multiplayer



### 28 Indies

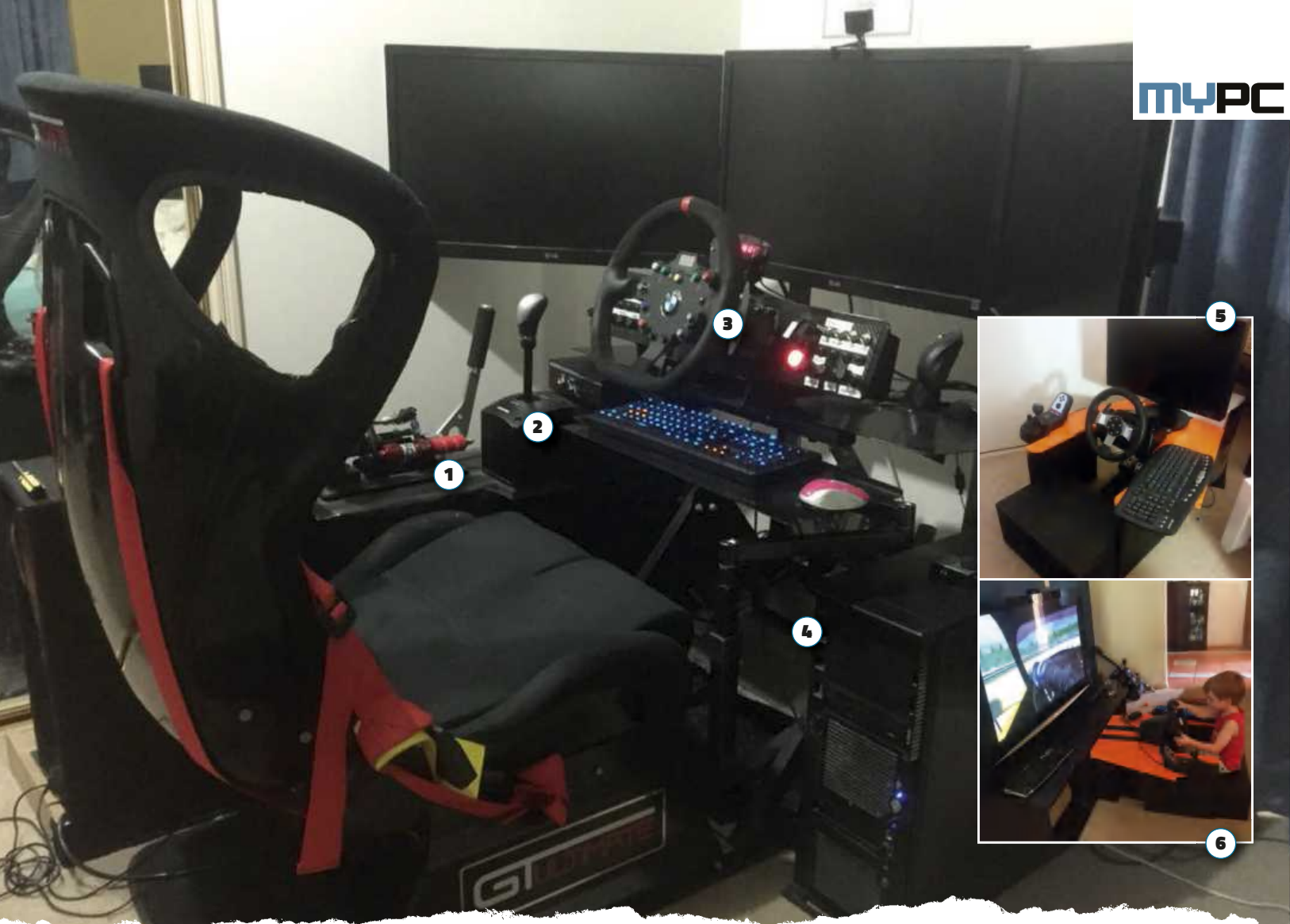
The best of independant development



### 32 10 to Watch

The most exciting games on the horizon





## ROBERT 39, BELLBOWRIE

It's a sim rig, used for playing simulation racing games and the occasional flight sim.

The specs of the PC itself aren't all that flash:

- 16MB DDR RAM @ 1333Mhz
- i7 2600K @ 4.2Ghz, watercooled
- 1x128GB Vertex 3 SSD
- 1x128GB Vertex 2 SSD
- 1x2TB WD Black HDD
- 2xR9 280X video cards in Crossfire
- 1xXonar DG soundcard

The sim gear is as follows:

- Next Level Racing GTUltimate V2 "chassis" with triple monitor stand, keyboard tray, and desktop
- Fanatec Clubsport V1 wheel with BMW Z4 GT2 rim + Formula rim.
- Fanatec Clubsport V2 pedals
- Fanatec Shifter SQ
- Derek Speares Designs L + R Clubsport Button boxes

- Derek Speares Designs hydraulic handbrake
- Siminstruments Dashboard
- Buttkicker Gamer w/Simvibe software

I kept my old gear when I upgraded and built my 3 year old son his very own sim rig

- Intel Q6600 PC w/4GB ram
- R9 280X video card
- Logitech G27 wheel, pedals, shifter
- 1 custom rig made from the bits of my very first custom simrig + paint scheme
- 1 very happy simracing mad 3yo :)

1. Hydraulic handbrake! Now that's serious gear right there.
2. The Fanatec shifter is by far the best on the market
3. Ben is jealous
4. The specs aren't flash, he says
5. The most adorable racing setup ever
6. One very lucky 3 year old

## ROBERT WINS!

For his awesome sim rig, Robert scores himself a QNAP HS-210 Silent NAS. Enjoy!



winner!

**WANT FREE STUFF?** Send your MyPC entry today to [mypc@pcpowerplay.com.au](mailto:mypc@pcpowerplay.com.au). Include the four most impressive elements of its hardware, your last upgrade, your dream upgrade, your favourite feature and what you think makes your PC special. Make sure to include your name, age and location. And last but not least, attach a 5MP or bigger image of your PC! No camera phone shots, and make sure it's in focus!



## PAX 2015

Melbourne once again played host to the biggest gaming convention in Australia, and once again it made for an amazing, if tiring three days.

It's not hyperbole to say that PAX 2015 has been the best yet. After a busy but rocky first year in 2013, the move from the previous event space to the Melbourne Convention Centre has allowed the organisers and the patrons alike to do and see more over the three day event.

This year more tech vendors than previous years made their presence known on the show floor. Microsoft, in addition to having a massive Xbox booth, also had a series of high powered, extremely expensive gaming PCs specifically made for PAX on display. When we say high powered and extremely expensive we're not blowing smoke – one of the machines featured triple SLI with 980 Ti cards and was valued around the 10k mark. Running games like Elite Dangerous, We Happy Few and Ark: Survival Evolved, the four machines on display, with cases ranging from a fish tank through to more standard, yet still elegant fare were open to the public. Players could then vote for their favourite machine on the floor and at the end of

the weekend one very lucky gamer went home with the winning machine.

MSI, Asus, Gigabyte, Mwave, Alienware, Intel, Roccat and more had a presence on the show floor, spruiking the latest in their peripheral, PC and component lines, with ample opportunity for hands on. Taiwanese case manufacturer In Win set up shop on the show floor first time, showing off their rather ridiculous, if somewhat awesome mechanical, transforming H-Tower case, as well as their more restrained ATX cases. In Win are looking to become as well known in Australia as they are in Asia, so expect to see a lot more from them in 2016.

Even though every publisher worth their salt had a stand showing off their latest and greatest AAA titles, the winners of PAX 2015, much like the previous years, was the Indie section. Scores of Indie titles, both foreign and domestic graced the show floor and drew considerable crowds from opening to closing on all three days of the convention. Meghann O'Neill, PC PowerPlay's

resident Indie games writer will bring you the full highlights of the show in coming issues but there were very few games we saw that didn't impress. Some of the standouts included Klang, an incredible looking and very enjoyable German made rhythm platformer that fuses Strider style movement with EDM, Objects in Space, a slow but very involving space sim developed by Sydney based team, Flat Earth Games that approaches space combat in a manner similar to submarine combat. Bonus points to Flat Earth for creating a working Arduino based console full of flashing lights and appealing buttons. Another real standout, and crowd favourite was Death Squared, a diabolically difficult co-op puzzle game developed by SMG Studio. One of the last games funded by the Screen Australia grant before it was cut by the government, Death Squared pulled big crowds and furrowed many brows as players tried to work together to achieve the simple sounding task of guiding colour blocks to similarly targets.





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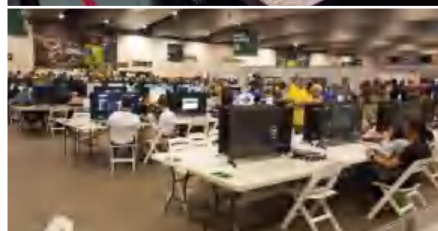
Four customizable zones of brilliant multicolor backlighting deliver nearly unlimited lighting adjustability.





## PAX IN PICTURES

Photos don't do justice to the size of the crowds that flooded through PAX. Here's just a taste.





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## THE TRUE POWER OF PAX

There's games, and cosplay, and awesome geekery, but the real draw of PAX AUS is in its amazing array of panel discussions. David Hollingworth braved the crowds for some real gems.

To say there is a lot to see at PAX AUS is somewhat of an understatement. I know a few people who had one-day passes, and saw only a small fraction of that they wanted. Personally, I had a three-day pass, and still didn't see everything. There's a wide variety of games on show, from soon to release AAA titles with their two-hour long lines, and private booths, to a swathe of fascinating indie games made by a passionate few who are just super-damn-excited to show off what they've been working on.

There are huge LANs where you can come along and play on a high-spec PC, handheld gaming lounges, and even an array of classic pinball machines!

But it's not just about PC and console, either. The tabletop area is huge, and here you'll find card games, boardgames, wargames and even roleplaying games. You can learn to play something new, take part in a huge game of Warhammer 40,000, or even just snag a table with some mates and play a round of Cards Against Humanity.

And then there's the cosplay, and the catching up with friends, and the... yeah. There's a lot on.

But the real heart of the three days are PAX's panels. From small rooms to entire auditoriums, from two people to six, the panels discuss all manner of gaming topics. From building narrative in the medium of games, to the importance to diversity in both companies and the games we play, to getting a master game-maker like Warren Spector to sit down and play Deus Ex for the first time in years... it's all there.

And it's all very open, too. The point of the panels isn't just to listen – they're highly interactive, from questions, to live audience polls, and even feedback to create new games. The point is, the panels make you a part of the conversation, while also opening up the professional lives of developers and journalists, games masters and card game makers.

Probably one of my favourite panels this was on the topic of gaming and mental health. You could really feel the audience responding to the panellists and their stories of either using coping to help cope, and from the industry professionals looking to explore the therapeutic side of gaming. Hanging around after, to give my regards to one of the panellists, I saw a lot of other people coming up to thank them for sharing – and to make them feel like they were not alone, and could talk about their issues.

The games are great; the costumes are marvellous to look at and wear. Seeing friends, often for the first time, is simply amazing.

But the panels make the show. That's where you'll learn about the industry and what makes it tick.





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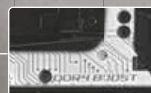
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# Time to buy

But you don't need it all

**H**ow's the upgrade season been treating you? Been splurging gleefully, or are you perhaps engaged in selectively targeted tactical improvements to your system?

It's a tough economic hell, being a PC gamer. Just when something stabilises, the boat goes and rocks again. We have all enjoyed the last few years of no, or very few, CPU upgrades. For most games, any quad-core Intel CPU from 2009's Sandy Bridge onward is well enough. Even simheads, for whom a powerful CPU is critical, get by fine with five-year-old CPUs.

We've also been well treated by games when it comes to GPUs. Your needs and desires will vary, but the big \$1,000 annual video card tax is well behind us. I would regard anything circa AMD 280x or Nvidia 780 to be totally gruntworthy.

The Skylake CPU came along, with its friends the 100-series motherboards. Do you need them? Nope, in fact the only big reason to upgrade to Skylake is if your CPU and mobo is of Sandy Bridge vintage, and the biggest win you're going to see is probably gaining support for SATA 3 and USB 3!

RAM? 8GB is fine. 16GB is just for show offs. Cue letters... SSDs? Now we're talking. Prices have steadily slid over the last couple of years to the point where most working people can afford to look beyond an almost-worthless tinydrive, like in the order of 128GB or so. Worthless! Instead – as you may well have been doing already – it's time to start packing your PC with large capacity SSDs, and many of them. Our slogan for 2016 is 'no more mechanical hard drives'. Bury them in a hole. A fun hole. By that I mean the



kind somebody else has to dig, because digging is tiresome and difficult. Unless it's your job to dig holes, in which case I'm terribly embarrassed and wish you the very best with your next project.

SSDs also come in sexy new next-gen flavours. That there's another reason to consider moving to the 100-series platform. But you can wait, no hurry, there are only three next-gen SSDs worth having right now (Intel 750, Samsung 750 Pro and HyperX Predator), and they're all fabulously fast, but also close to the same price as a super sexy new monitor. I shan't go on and on once again about how monitors are the new amazing,

manufacturing processes. And that's not the fun queue.

Ok. Sorry. I'm totally kidding about everything. Ha ha! Got you there with some balanced sensible thinking. Buy everything your gaming heart desires. Lash out, splash out, smash that credit card. You won't regret it for a second, even if your last thing was from last month. Hell, that's what I've always done. There's no pleasure quite like it.

I'll tell you what people aren't buying, though. Not anyone, apparently. DVDs and sound cards. I know this because over in PC & Tech Authority magazine, which is my main day job round these parts, mostly, we asked around most of the big players in the reseller channel ('shops'), and next to no one is ordering these parts with new systems.

The conclusion we've drawn from that is not that people don't use them, it's that they don't actually need replacing. If your DVD is still functional, yank it out of your ex-box, shove it in your new PC – voila \$40 saved! Or how ever much they cost these days, haven't looked in ten years, cos that's how long I've had my current DVD.

The same is true of sound cards. While mobo sound is getting pretty amazing, a discrete sound card can be better. An Asus Xonar ST/X or Creative X-Fi is still better than most mobo solutions, but they've been the same for years, so why replace what's not been improved?

Of course, if you don't have a sound card or DVD drive at all, we understand, you cutting-edge econonaut, you. But how ever will you access the wonders on the PCPP and PCTA cover discs? Yes, indeed. **PC**

## ■ Thanks Nvidia, thanks AMD. Screw you, the common good ■

and how the year 2015 will forever be remembered as the Year of the Ultrawide Curved SyncySynced Screen. No. But do please wait, just a little longer on that front. Amazing screens still have some evolutionary hurdles to leap across, like better aspect ratios with more generous consideration to vertical resolution, and combining G-Sync and FreeSync in a single monitor. Ha! Ok, that'll never happen. Politics will snuff that light out, thanks Nvidia, thanks AMD. Screw you, the common good.

Anyway, don't buy a monitor just yet. It takes months for LCD panel factories to change to a new format/standard/technology, and your favourite game is just going to have to stand in line behind Chinese and Korean panel



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## Dragon's Dogma: Dark Arisen

DEVELOPER CAPCOM  
PUBLISHER CAPCOM  
DUE JAN 2016  
[www.dragonsdogma.com](http://www.dragonsdogma.com)

One of the most enjoyable third-person action RPGs of 2012 is about to make its way to the PC, bringing the Dark Arisen expansion pack with it. Utilising an interesting hybridised class system and clever online support that allows your NPC companion to join other parties when you're offline, DD should be a hit on PC.



# The Dreams of Bedlam

The most profitable enterprises aren't businesses – they're cults. Savvy devs leverag this dark secret to their advantage...

**A** perennial question: When will video games grow up? It's a query oft pitched as an unsolvable conundrum, but recent events have proven beyond doubt that video games have indeed reached a state of maturity. Why? Because they now pander to the most insidious of all human impulses: millennial hysteria. The tendency to go all-in on a mass delusion, a get-rich scheme, or some other all-consuming cause. To wilfully abandon all capacity for reason.

The Kickstarter mania of 2012 was a legitimate phenomenon, but it was just a taste. If Tim Schafer was John the Baptist, then Chris Roberts is Jesus Christ.

Free from the time limits of the mainstream crowd-funding sites, Star Citizen has enjoyed unlimited access to the piggy banks of nostalgic space cadets everywhere. As of this writing, Roberts Space Industries boasts over one million paying customers, and US\$93 million in funds raised. You seldom see sums that large outside of the business pages, but as well-informed readers will already know, there is a key difference between Star Citizen and most normal businesses.

Take the benighted Masters hardware chain. It may be in dire straits, but at least they are selling tangible products – you can walk in, buy a packet of screws, and be on your way. But in the Star Citizen Star Store, even the intangibles are intangible (for now, at least). And they could well be intangible for the foreseeable future. The Escapist recently published a tell-all story in which a dozen or so anonymous ex-RSI employees spilled their guts, telling a tale of tyrannical, wasteful



management, of a completely lost cause.

Official updates from RSI boast of the Hollywood celebrities they've roped in for mo-cap. Meanwhile, boring old Frontier Developments is rolling out oodles of new content for Elite Dangerous, which we will remind readers is a real game that you can really play.

Of the two ventures Star Citizen is the more 'grown up,' because there is nothing more grown-up than being utterly convinced of the righteousness of a doomed enterprise. A child might doubt himself, but an adult always knows he's right. From Dutch Tulip Mania to Australia's recent resources

scrambling to get youngsters hooked into this dark web via expensive lumps of plastic. Of these schemes LEGO Dimensions is the most ambitious, and it could prove to be the most profitable of them all. Consider the precedent set by Warhammer 40,000 – the Games Workshop people figured out a long time ago that if you have the right IP, fans will willingly spend thousands of dollars to own your little totems. The more shamelessly you over-charge, the more people are willing to pay.

It's striking how much Skylanders has changed the face of this industry in just five years – and it's bizarre to think that the men behind it, Paul Reiche III and Fred Ford, once gave us the sublime space combat game Star Control 2. At the rate they're going they'll never return to the franchise, and maybe that's for the best. Imagine if Activision published it today... the basic Star Control box would come with the game, an e-reader, and little plastic toys of an Earthling Cruiser, a Spathi Eluder, and maybe a VUX Intruder. But if you wanted to pilot something more badass, like a Chmmr Avatar or a Thraddash Torch, you'd have to buy it separately at K-Mart.

Gamers would gladly abandon all fiscal probity just to experience the giddy thrill of squandering their savings on every last rare figurine. The suits would gouge us for hundreds of bucks, and we'd love them for it.

This is the ultimate evolution of the gaming industry. The childish enterprise sees the customer as a friend. The mature, grown-up business sees him as a sap. So yes: video games have grown up. Because they treat you like a baby. Next question? **PC**

■ The childish enterprise sees the customer as a friend. The mature, grown-up business sees him as a sap ■

boom, human history has been defined and advanced by the bold vision of those who know in their hearts that they must piss their life savings up against a wall.

The public response to the scale of these schemes is uncanny. When nVIDIA expects you to register so they can flog your details to advertisers, there's an outcry. When Overkill Software adds micro-transactions to Payday 2, there's a revolt. Chisellers are despised because they don't think big. If your want people to love you, you just need to commit daylight robbery.

Take the trendy new technological paradigm that promises to revolutionise the way we live our lives, the blandly-titled "Internet of Things." Activision, Disney, Nintendo, and Warner Bros. are



**JAMES COTTEE** is waiting for the giant space robot to come and claim his soul



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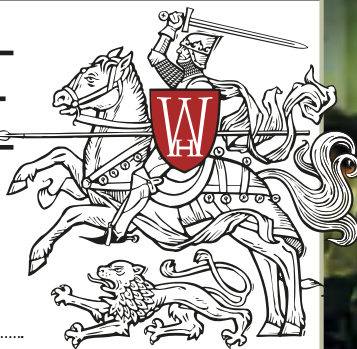
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# DIE BY THE SWORD



WHO VIKTOR BOCAN

WHERE WARHORSE STUDIOS

WHY KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE

The trailers for *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* have dazzled gamers with their promise of a true-to-life simulation of medieval combat. We talk to lead designer **Viktor Bocan** about how his up-and-coming Czech studio is setting a new standard for action RPGs...

**V**iktor Bocan is a 20-year veteran of the games industry, having served as a lead designer at Bohemia Interactive on *Operation Flashpoint* and *ArMA*, and as a senior designer at 2K Czech. More recently he co-founded Warhorse Studios, and for a couple of years now this start-up has been crafting a whole new take on the role-playing paradigm.

"We always wanted to play an open-world RPG without all of those common fantasy elements. We still love *The Elder Scrolls* and *The Witcher*, but there's a lot of games like those and we were thinking like 'what would you do, living in the dark medieval world, wanting to survive, having only things that were really available?' So we decided to make an RPG with all RPG elements like character development, captivating story, role playing, a lot of dialogues and interesting people, sophisticated combat system, large open world where you can go anywhere you want to do anything you need – but to put it into the real countryside in a real historical period.

"So we did just that. You still have all those ingredients you need to enjoy the RPG, meanwhile you may try for yourself what it was to live in such era. So you can look at the game as some kind of time machine: early 15th century in Europe was really an interesting time."

Naturally, all of the research conducted by the Warhorse team had to be balanced by practical issues of game balance. So just how historical is *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*?

"Really historical! But I'd like to add that the 'history-ness' and 'authenticity' aren't the goal, they are rather the way we are going. We do not create historical RPG just to be historical, we create an RPG and place it into history because we believe it's interesting. Look at popular historical

movies and TV shows and documentaries – it's quite a shame that there are basically no games with the same approach."

But to make such a game work meant paying a great deal of attention to detail. "Not only that you have no potatoes or tomatoes in Central Europe at the time. You have specific trees and forests, orange carrots didn't exist yet, etc. When we released the first footage from the game, we had a lot of interesting feedback – and people started to 'play our game' with historical realism.

"We've got a nice letter from a guy who made a thesis about herd behavior. He claimed that the sheep we are showing move wrong – so we changed that. Some people pointed out that we cannot have

■ we have decided at the beginning that we want the swords sliding over each other ■

white chickens in the game – they were cultivated much later. Etc."

Early in development Viktor's team did a lot of reading. Now they employ a full-time historian. "You encounter a lot of interesting challenges while making such an accurate game. Like when you want the world to be filled with interesting people doing their common daily routines, but still working in the RPG sense. You want to have an armorer so the player can buy armour – but armourers weren't stocked up with armour to the roof those days, it was too expensive and too risky for him so you needed to order the plate cuirass [chest armour] in advance." It might look nice for an in-game tailor to show off his wares on showroom dummies, but they were

invented for common use much later.

"Many of these are 'just small things,' but perfection is made by exactly those small things. Is it important for the game itself? Not much. It is something that makes the world even more believable, real and interesting? Definitely yes!"

This is not the first time that a new developer has tried to create a video game with a truly realistic take on medieval sword fighting – Neal Stephenson's disastrous *CLANG!* Kickstarter project comes to mind. So what is it that sets Warhorse's new combat system apart?

"When we started to make a realistic game, we have decided that we want realism in combat too – and started to study it. There are two levels of this realism: physics (so the weapons behave right) and historical fencing (so we can show the combat how it really looked).

"The first is the physics: we have decided at the beginning that we want the swords sliding over each other, colliding with environment or armor. It just doesn't look right when you slash the person through the plate armor and hurt it for 1 HP because that's an RPG game. In reality, you even cannot penetrate the plate with a simple sword, you need a falchion or an axe or a mace to harm the knight. In a 3D environment with a first person camera all this is something that is very hard to achieve, but we just wanted it because we felt that 'just playing animations and let RPG count it' isn't good enough. Two years later we are very happy with what we achieved."

But how did they then imbue these mechanics with historical realism? "Combat didn't usually look how it is often displayed in movies or games: it is way harder to master. European combat had very specific style with very diverse stances and strikes. It's also kind of lost in time: once people started using firearms there was no need





for huge armours because the gun penetrated them anyway. With armours gone, large swords were no longer needed too and the fencing changed a lot. Now people are rediscovering how the knights' duels really looked like, how longswords were used, which techniques were the best to deal with an armored opponent, with unarmored one or with three rednecks with pitchforks. We are following this and found really interesting and even 'gamey' elements in it. At the end it's a lot of fun to develop. We have various combat stances, different types of attacks to different parts of the body, feints and tricks and pushes and pommel strikes and it turned out good at the end."

Likewise, the RPG system in Kingdom Come aims for depth and realism. "You improve in what you do – you fight a lot, you get better in it. If you pick up every flower, you get better in herbalism. Equipment is used as it really was: in layers. You have 14 slots for clothes alone, because if you want to wear plate cuirass, you need to dress up a gambeson first, then ideally chain mail shirt and cuirass over it. All this you can do in the game and it influences your defense very much: if you were just wearing cuirass alone, it's quite good against simple slashes but once you get hit by a mace it would damage you greatly because even in reality you need something soft under the plate. Of course, you can combine different armors in different layers on different body parts and that leads to countless combinations.

"It's also important that most of the gameplay (especially combat) combines player's skills with those of player's character. Combat is real time directly controlled and based on reflexes – but it gets significantly easier once you level up in combat skills. Good examples are 'master strikes,' hits that can kill in one strike during defense (you essentially go against the enemy attack and while deflecting the enemy sword you also strike to weak spot in one move). These are very hard to perform first and against tough opponents, but once your character levels up or is fighting beginner you can pull them out quite easily."

Despite centuries of obsolescence, traditional European martial arts are making something of a comeback. Some members of the Warhorse team have been known to dabble – all in the name of research, of course. "I wouldn't say that we all started to train with a sword, as I believe most members of car racing simulation teams are not driving like crazy during development. But yes, we learn a lot. As a combat designer I undertook summer course with a long sword, some animators started to train fencing – but mostly we learn from professionals we hire for help with a combat system. They are people studying medieval combat techniques for a living but they are also gamers and we are really working hard together on connecting every game system with some real combat moves that look cool and would work in real duel.

"We are still accident-free – last time I missed our Executive Producer's eye by at least three centimetres with a spear so everything is fine so far."

Kingdom Come: Deliverance is due to launch in winter 2016. For more details, visit [KingdomComeRPG.com](http://KingdomComeRPG.com). JAMES COTTEE PC

# An Honest (Almost) History

I know that this is a time sensitive wager worth \$20,000, but I just want to talk to the gal on the train with the tentacle glove one more time.

**E**arlier this year, I mentioned *80 Days*, by Inkle, as at least partially responsible for my newfound dissatisfaction with supposedly “authentic” historical fiction. Now the game has been released on PC, I am excited to discuss it in more detail. Loosely based on Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*, it is primarily a piece of interactive fiction, leading to (each playthrough) mere sequential moments within an impossible glut of content. The game elements are slight, but important, including managing time, money and route, as well as the overarching goal of traversing the globe in less than eighty days.

On leaving London, and this is set in 1872, you are immediately thrust onto a submarine train, and underwater. It is an incredible introduction to a universe which is both very faithful and fabulously alternative. I contacted writer, Meg Jayanth, to ask after her process. On the *Amphitrite Express*, she says, “We realised that we had to establish the premise of the world straight away, and in no uncertain terms, with something wondrous but also just familiar enough. A submersible version of the Eurostar worked on all fronts.” In a way similar to in the 2011 film, *Hugo*, mechanical creations that never quite existed lend the setting a certain technological magic.

In fact, throughout the world you will frequently encounter humanoid automata. The story of the Artificer’s Guild is told incidentally, as it intersects with the politics of the day. You will find robots as everything from soldiers to dancers, while encountering regulations about their creation and management. Many are not even humanoid. For example, you may be pulled by robot



horses, between cities. Or, hold tight as a whole city, Agra, stands up and carries you to Calcutta. On this, Jayanth says, “I wanted our alternate world to have old roots. Agra is almost forgotten technology, so old it’s virtually mystical to modern artificers and engineers.”

When I discussed the adventure game, *A Golden Wake*, I challenged its treatment of the, “war era secretary,” not because I am widely read on the subject, but because of my grandma’s exciting tales of being picked up on a motorcycle and taken to a dark warehouse to communicate with Russia, as well as her, unlikely but real, letter from Stalin. My grandfather, who I never met, was also stationed in Lahore for many years.

■ creations that never quite existed lend the setting a certain technological magic ■

Growing up, I had one insight into British colonialism. After I visited India, and some of the places my grandfather had been, I learned more, even if the people I spoke to rarely agreed on aspects of its legacy, good and bad. And, I rode on some amazing trains. *80 Days* cleverly raises difficult questions about the impact of colonialism through its people and conversations. In addition to the Indian cities, my last playthrough took me through Brisbane. There, I met a woman from the Murri tribe, who was sad to be serving as a maid, rather than engaging with her ancestral homeland as she had expected to. She is writing a letter of protest to the local newspaper.

Jayanth says, “Passepartout is a tourist. He might get involved in people’s stories,

or struggles, but they don’t centre on him. We structured her dialogue cagily, making it easy to have her turn away or shut down. You (as Passepartout) might have the most noble of intentions, but that doesn’t mean you have a right to someone’s trust. It means that sometimes a door will be shut in your face because you are an outsider, or white, or French, or a man, and that’s a good experience for the player to have.” Certainly, I was interested in Passepartout’s dialogue during this conversation, especially his views on progress and modernity, as well as Fogg’s initial assertion that all the world is open to an Englishman.

Most interestingly, I had a basic appreciation for the colonial context of characters in India and Australia, but when I got to Africa, finally, and after a near fatal lack of cash for passage in South America, I realised that women here wouldn’t be maids. They would be warrior, airship captains. Hilariously, my Passepartout developed a crush on one of them, as she was cannily casing him out, being the enemy and all. The world is beautifully detailed from city to city, East to West, and in a way that both embraces the people who were, as well as those who could have been.

My journeys around this unique world have been a joy. As well as the wondrous steampunk backdrop, just engaging with people I’d never before imagined left me wanting more. Perhaps you can now appreciate why *80 Days* has ruined a lot of historical fiction for me. After all, Jayanth says, “The late 19th century was full of people pushing the boundaries of science, society, gender, class, race and sexuality. We tried to infuse that into our cast of characters.” They succeeded. I hope you will play it. **PC**



**MEGHANN O'NEILL'S** record for circumnavigating the globe is 68 days, but only because she couldn't compromise on content any further.



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# A Collection Aside



This month, **MEGHANN O'NEILL** got addicted to a card game and then cured herself with a homemade drug. Sadly, it wasn't without its side effects and she spent a few weeks raving about whether clowns are actually evil or just big and huggable. Then she had to have a lie down while the world spun around her octopus. Don't worry, she's fine now and this introduction will all make sense, soon enough. Join this wild ride where you will, though, there is a game for every taste within.

## AIRSCAPE

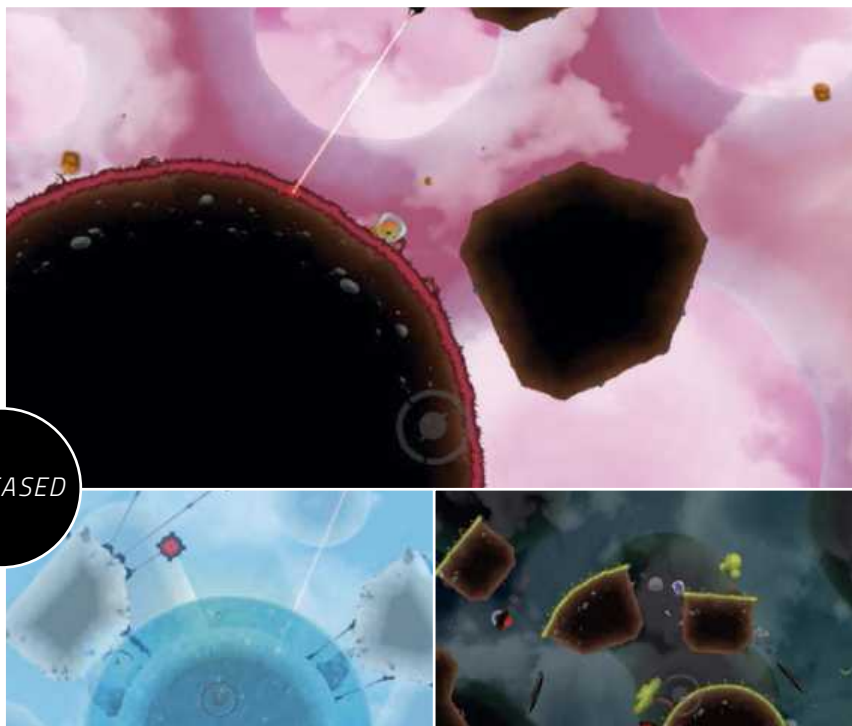
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Next month, these pages will be full of PAX games again. It seems to have come around really quickly. Last year, I saw 50 locally made PC indies and wrote up 10, deliberately choosing not to repeat coverage of the many games returning from 2013. I distinctly remember Aircscape: The Fall of Gravity not capturing my attention. Sadly, part of the PAX problem is that I will have time for a quick chat, a look and only maybe a play. First impressions are important, and there are other considerations for what gets covered, like showcasing a mix of genres and release dates.

Remembering the game, nonetheless, I was interested, and saddened, to read a Gamasutra blog post by designer, Daniel West, titled, "Good isn't good enough, releasing an indie game in 2015." He outlines his disappointment at a lack of press coverage and commercial success, despite the game being specifically featured in the Indie Showcase at PAX and his overall satisfaction with the PR process. In particular, this line grabbed me, "Some kind hearted journalist or youtuber will take a special interest in a game, but on a grander scale, press want clicks."

In my opinion, PCPP's coverage of indie games is excellent, but what I want A Collection Aside to be, specifically, is a place that links you, personally, to some special aspect of a game you might otherwise not have heard of. It's really important games find their audience, whoever they are. With this in mind, I purchased my own copy of Aircscape and it is not what I was expecting it to be. I could elaborate on how I now understand why it didn't immediately interest me, then subsequently did, at least somewhat, but I'd rather just describe the game so you can decide if it is for you.

Most notably, it is punishing. By the second level I was failing. Only a little



RELEASED

further on and I was dying 3, 9, 20, 50 times at any given point. Checkpoints are regular, however, and I could feel myself improving at whatever the incrementally more difficult manoeuvre was. Progression is more exciting in challenging games, too. I really quite like trying to master something difficult and the feeling of achievement when you do. I also find that a new place and challenge is usually a suitable reward for my efforts.

Thinking about how the physics work is essential. How will your jump be affected by unusual gravity, how much speed do you

need to "pop" the bubble of water you're floating in, how will the enemy missile track its path around corners of "straight" land? The controls might initially feel unwieldy, until you understand how to slow down. It is also quite gorgeous, from squishy octopus sounds to colourful, enigmatic visuals and an orchestral soundtrack. Whatever my first impression was, "beautiful difficulty" is my enduring one.

Of course, the game did leave me wondering. Why is the character an octopus? How did the octopus get here? What is this place? Why are there pockets of floating sea and mechanical Lolo Balls trying to kill me? Do these questions need answers? I would have liked the game to explore a more narrative approach, because that would have enriched my commitment to beating the difficult puzzles. Regardless, although I decided not to cover the game this time last year, you hopefully now have the information required to decide if it is for you.

Why is the character an octopus? How did the octopus get here? What is this place?



## BIG PHARMA

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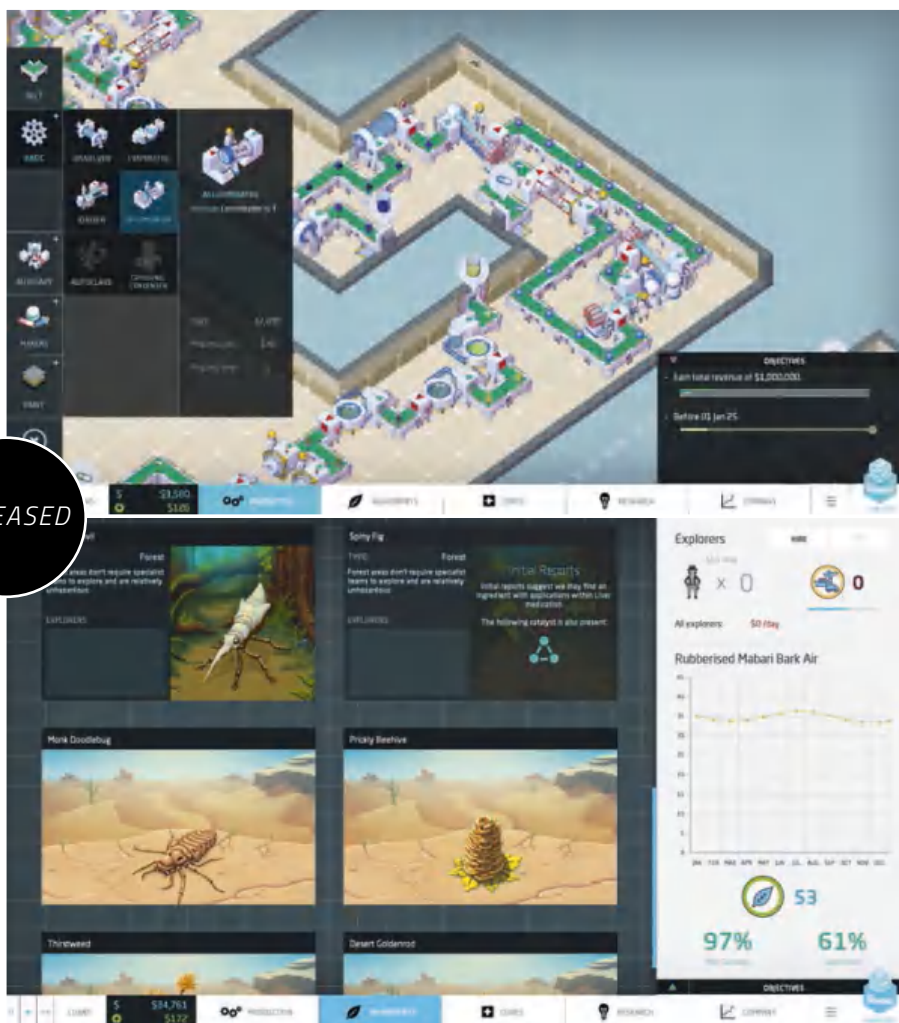
PRICE \$25

[www.bigpharmagame.com](http://www.bigpharmagame.com)

Remember, about six years ago, when PC Powerplay published everyone's five favourite games of all time and I included Theme Hospital and got laughed off the forums? Do you? I do. Well, who is laughing now? The lady who has cornered the market on anti-seizure medication is who is laughing; me. Ha ha ha. People like heart attacks with their lack of seizures, right? If they don't, I may have a cream for that, a very itchy cream. Big Pharma addresses, if not quite actually cures, the withdrawal symptoms Theme Hospital left behind. It's good, but I do wish it were more.

Immediately, Big Pharma is impersonal. Why did I bankrupt myself to save one guy with Bloaty Head in Theme Hospital? Well, you could either watch him keel over in front of your very eyes or hear that satisfying pop as he was successfully treated by an expensive doctor and piece of machinery. Big Pharma only shows numbers in a way that has turned me quite evil. Yes, you can play as altruistic, curing cancer and genital warts, but why, when you are only looking at a balance sheet? If you can't see someone experiencing "anal leakage" why fork out to remove side effects?

Yes, another key difference between these two games is that Big Pharma is mostly rooted in reality. In Theme Hospital you're trying to treat Chronic Nose Hair and Third Degree Sideburns with the kind of passion reserved for silly scenarios. In Big Pharma, I could certainly try to remove dizziness and hallucinations from my diabetes medicine, but it's so much easier to take a money-grubbing approach than emotionally engage with what can be a chronic and



serious illness for many people. This is my leisure time, after all.

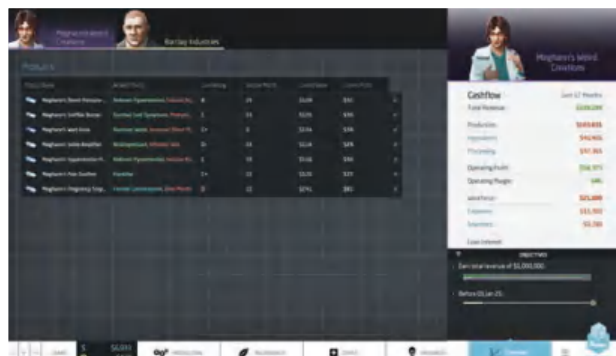
Does the game function as some kind of cynical conspiracy theory into the operation of the pharmaceutical industry, drawing you into its impersonal approach? Is it supposed to challenge you to experience the minds of the bean counters who seem to hardly consider their wider role as care providers? Who knows? What I do know is that as soon as I relinquished the expectation this was Theme Hospital for a next generation, I started really

enjoying the deep concentration that came with trying to make drugs that mostly worked and mostly made a profit.

Is it possible to activate the effect you want from an ingredient and eradicate the side effects in a way that confounds your

competitors? Can you mix it with something else, find the requisite catalyst and shake components apart so that they behave how you need them to? What machines do you need? Can you even structure belts and equipment with strict input and output requirements into an arrangement that works, on a small factory floor? Will people pay for Panadol with horrendous side effects? Not so much. Virility drugs that make you puke? Yes.

The challenge/campaign options are varied and plentiful, incorporating research in the field and lab, as well as targets to achieve. Or, play freeform with unlimited funds. Either way, all the wacky drug combinations lend themselves to some pretty funny emergent storytelling moments, like when I thought I was selling contraception, but I'd messed up the process. So that's why the game prompted me to name it, "Meghann's Sugar Pill." People were buying it. But it remains unfortunately easy to be flagrantly immoral, when the unwanted babies are crying somewhere off screen.





## CONCRETE JUNGLE

DEVELOPER COLE POWERED GAMES

PRICE \$16

[colepowered.com/concrete-jungle](http://colepowered.com/concrete-jungle)

■ You know the SimCity series and how, generally, things make sense but the process is obfuscated? Unless you wanted to spend lots of time staring at graphs, you could usually feel your way to victory just navigating by the RCI bars. Less so in Concrete Jungle, which condenses city building into easily digestible concepts, but in a way you must come to understand. This is a challenging card game with an endearing campaign and multiplayer mode. It forces you to give aspects like location, undesirable building output, population and land value more than a second thought.

It is also incredibly fun and so addictive. I am going to try to explain why, but it really just hit the perfect balance of strategy, planning and reactive thinking for my taste. Not to mention that each level teaches you something new and is long enough to be engaging, but never boring. Essentially, you must fill and clear the last row, like Tetris, to progress to a finish line. In solo mode, you must also reach land value targets, collecting points with residences, or fail. In versus mode (including against clever AI) simply score more points than your opponent.

Especially in comparison to Big Pharma, Concrete Jungle's incremental story is

engaging and hilarious. The banter between characters reminds me most of the sitcom, Parks and Recreation. Knowing that Giles Butterworth is a failed band member, now a drunk farmer, lends his particular style of play a certain authenticity, too. As Giles, the player learns to compose massive, incredibly powerful rural blocks. Each farm, farmhouse or barn links together to buff the group in some way and is placed on a square as you choose cards from the deck.

Alternatively, be the gormless mayor, Rick Selfridge, and reap the rewards of a kind of blundering "privilege," building rollercoasters and reversing things that aren't going your way. His dialogue includes such gems as, "Now we know why building 'asthma town' was a bad idea." Placing buildings with an economic bonus allows you to either purchase cards or special abilities, unique to each character. Rick's massive nude statue (of himself) is by far the most hysterical ability, providing a -1 debuff to all squares in direct line of sight of his naked male parts.

Another opponent places random burger joints in your path every four turns and there are various plucky young city planners to unlock for varying up your strategy. A few cards seem overpowered, like being able to invert an opponent's massively high land value on one square and potentially turning something like a +5 gain into a -5

RELEASED



loss for their row score, but it is a very well balanced game, overall. In multiplayer, you should be able to use the character of your choice to beat any other, but be careful you fully understand their strengths and weaknesses.

If you're a fan of card games, city builders or puzzle games, especially all three, I can't recommend Concrete Jungle highly enough. So, stack your deck with Coal Power Plants, sabotage your rival's land and then find you have a hand stacked with useless Waste cards. You can always build the Greens and Arthouse Cinemas on your side of the map. Until it is your opponent's turn and they build something horrible next to your houses. If you need more convincing this game is great, the card description for The Shops simply reads, "Cornetto." (I don't know. Maybe it's just me.)



## DROPSY THE CLOWN

DEVELOPER JAY THOLEN

PRICE \$10

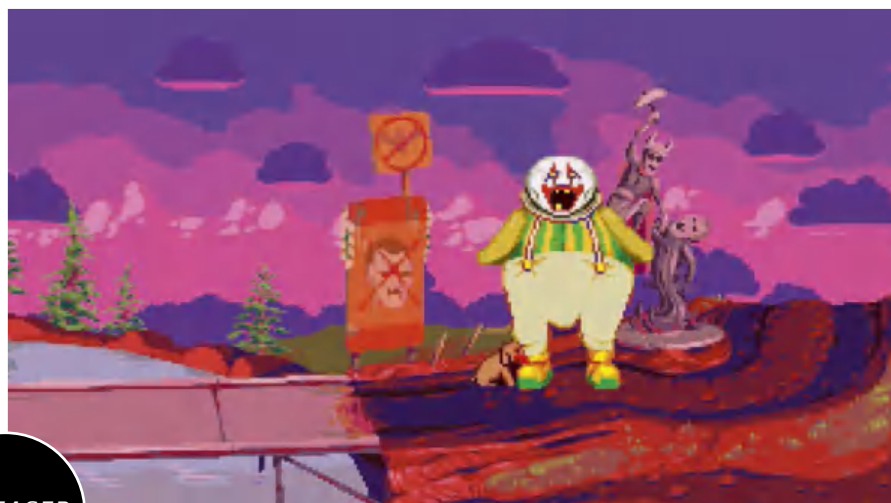
[store.steampowered.com/app/274350](http://store.steampowered.com/app/274350)

■ It's refreshing to laugh really genuinely in the first few minutes of playing a game. When I found the phone in Dropsy's tent, I was thinking, "Aha, how will this be handled; broken, a small selection of awkward conversations, refusal to dial?" Well, no. My every attempt to select a number resulted in several numbers being mashed ineffectively. It was a compelling way to introduce Dropsy as a clumsy, unlovable and very tragic character. Also, I think his arms are balloons, possibly his entire body.

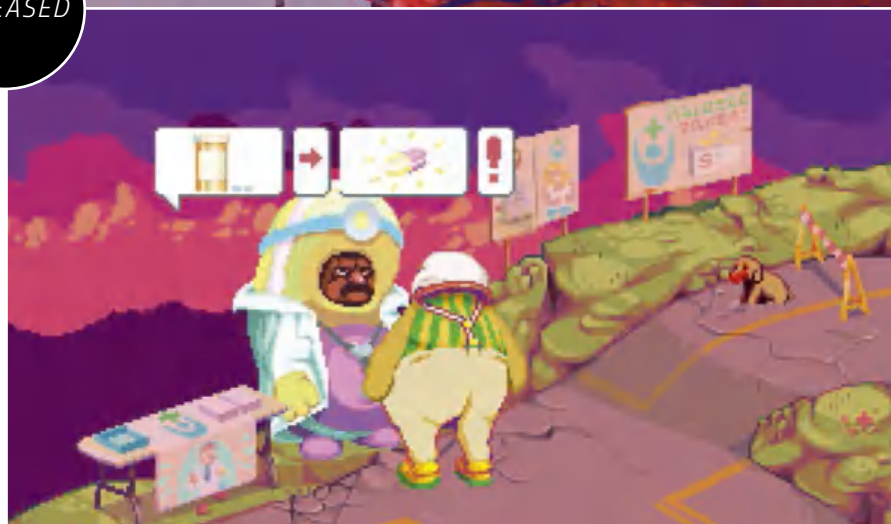
Then there's the fact that his tent has been painted with angry, anti-Dropsy graffiti he can't read and that almost everyone incoherently hates him. (He can't understand language, having to interpret what people are saying through simple pictures and iconography.) He is deliberately disturbing to behold, with a gaping mouth, massive head and garish costume and he sticks his balloon right down his pants every time he accesses the inventory in a way that is both creepy and entirely gormless.

From the outset, however, the emphasis is on Dropsy's special ability; the hug. It hints at the eventual affection people will have for this weird character, even if he must experience rejection so many times first. As Dropsy helps people with their various problems, he documents who he hugs on his bedroom wall, like The Witcher's Geralt keeps erotic artworks of the women he, well, never mind. My wall included a tree, a plant next to the, "do not touch the plants," sign and, honestly, I don't want to spoil your experimentation with hugs further. Just hug stuff.

The story plays out in a linear fashion



RELEASED



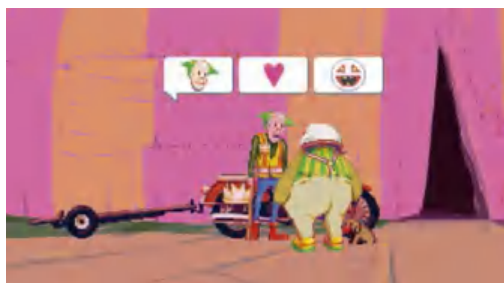
■ He is deliberately disturbing to behold, with a gaping mouth, massive head and garish costume ■

when you pursue it, but you can explore almost all of the world immediately. The day/night cycle means that locations and the movements of people change in a way that puzzling relies on. Dropsy can make time flow forwards by sleeping in his own bed, or in other beds, after he has unlocked areas or made friends. The best consequence of the open world approach is that you can piece together what is actually a very dystopian setting just by wandering and taking note of your surroundings and, later in the game, by hilarious car.

One of the best moments is when your dad loads you onto his motorbike trailer, drives through town and then has to throw up in the Portaloo. The narrative centres on public embarrassment and ominous foreshadowing. Very soon, the things you had initially walked past going, "Ooo, look at that," make perfect sense, without exposition or explanation. There are also the bloody, devouring nightmares and moments of crushing irony. Given

the game's structure, online hints are hard to find but I'd encourage you to play to the very end, for ultimate context.

Dropsy the Clown is an exceptional adventure game. I would suggest that it is a comment on the power of love or a cautionary tale about judging a book by its cover, but really it's just sneaking your mouse friend into a weird pharmaceutical company, figuring out how to turn security robots into party robots and trying to hug a dead body. Well, that and trying to make sure your doggy friend "uses" as many fire hydrants as possible before the game is over. Not many games can make a claim for Best Canine Peeing Animation. This is one of them, for sure. **PC**



# 10 to Watch



## ASHEN RIFT

DEVELOPER PYROCLASTIC GAMES  
PUBLISHER PYROCLASTIC GAMES  
DUE TBA  
[www.ashenrift.com](http://www.ashenrift.com)

■ Ashen Rift is just the thing for people who like both survival games and dogs. It promises a deep and emotional experience, as you traverse an expansive and constantly changing wasteland with a canine companion. The game is clearly focusing more on its journey rather than the destination, having you testing your survival skills, while providing a different experience each time you play with its constantly shifting environment. Not to be confused with A Boy and His Dog.



## FIVE: GUARDIANS OF DAVID

DEVELOPER KINGDOM GAMES  
PUBLISHER KINGDOM GAMES  
DUE NOVEMBER 24, 2015  
[www.fiveguardiansofdavid.com](http://www.fiveguardiansofdavid.com)

■ Not all biblical games are Noah's Ark 3D. Players have five different characters to choose from to fight their way through enemies in the name of King David, in this eleven part story arc. The game tries to encourage players to think while also encouraging them to break away from certain habits that many of us have developed when playing RPGs. It also includes a miracle system so that you can eliminate enemies with a number of heavenly attacks.

## TURNOVER

DEVELOPER LONG DIVISION LLC  
PUBLISHER LONG DIVISION LLC  
DUE TBA  
[www.turnovergame.net](http://www.turnovergame.net)

■ Obviously there are many people out there who are big fans of Die Hard, including the people developing Turnover. Players take the role of an office drone, Clea, who must escape the armed guards attempting to take over the building, like an 8-Bit John McLane. The game itself seems to promise a lot of tense moments and close calls, reactive enemy AI will ensure you never quite know what's coming next.

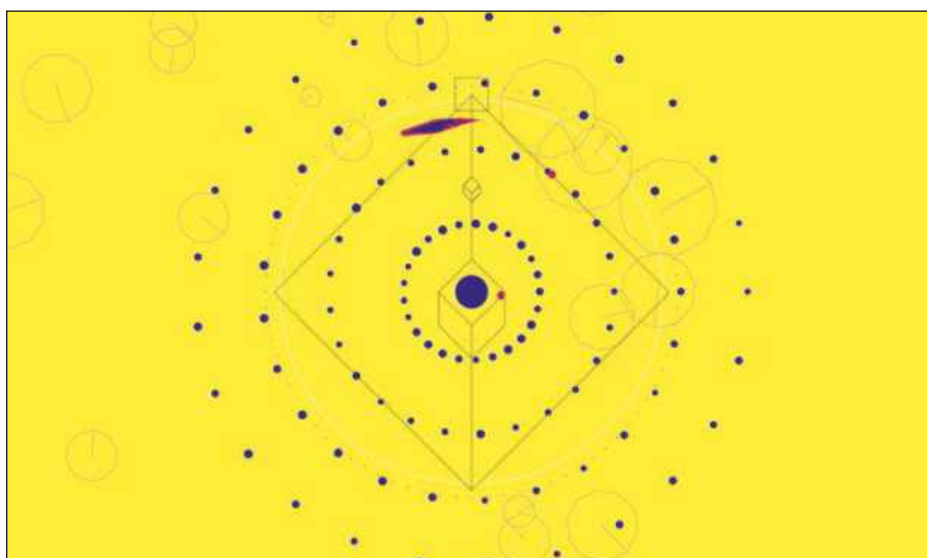




## FORCED: ETERNAL ARENAS

DEVELOPER BETA DWARF  
PUBLISHER BETA DWARF  
DUE 2016  
[www.eternalarenas.com](http://www.eternalarenas.com)

■ Every so often there is a game that takes two things that have been done before and blends them together to make something new. That's exactly what you get in this experience as it combines the chaos of beat-em-ups with the strategy normally found in MOBAs thanks to a card based skill and equipment system. This mixture will have people staying on their toes as they find the best ways not to die.



## SOFT BODY

DEVELOPER ZEKE VARIANT  
PUBLISHER ZEKE VARIANT  
DUE TBA  
[www.softbodygame.com](http://www.softbodygame.com)

■ An action puzzle game that will challenge your thumbs as you try to control two mushy snake things simultaneously to paint a musical world. This is a game that is completely run on both its music and artistic imagery, with simple but elegant geometric design and an ambient soundtrack. As you complete each puzzle the music and images change making for a completely visual and auditory experience. Think hallucinatory twin stick action with colour slugs.

## GOLIATH

DEVELOPER WHALEBOX STUDIO  
PUBLISHER VIVA MEDIA  
DUE 2016  
[www.goliath-game.com](http://www.goliath-game.com)

■ The world of Goliath is a dangerous place. The ruins of hundreds of ancient civilisations dot the land, rival factions fight for dominance and everyone is under constant threat from the giant beasts that roam free. What's a boy to do to survive but build giant robot suits and punch the hell out of things? Goliath combines survival gaming with action and RPG elements as punching monsters is only one of the necessary tasks you must perform to remain alive.



## SONGBRINGER

**DEVELOPER** WIZARD FU GAMES  
**PUBLISHER** WIZARD FU GAMES  
**DUE** MARCH 2016  
[songbringer.com](http://songbringer.com)

■ PC gamers have never had legitimate access to The Legend of Zelda, one of the great action/RPG game franchises of all time, but Songbringer looks set to not only fill that need but also carve its own niche when it's released early next year. Armed with a nanosword, players explore procedurally generated worlds, each featuring nine dungeons, nine bosses and at least 200 secrets to discover. Songbringer will also feature a deep crafting/item combining system as well as a permadeath mode for the masochistic.



## AURION, LEGACY OF THE KORI-ODAN

**DEVELOPER** KIRO'O GAMES  
**PUBLISHER** PLUG IN DIGITAL LABEL  
**DUE** 2016  
[kiroogames.com/en](http://kiroogames.com/en)

■ Developed by a fledgling group of Cameroonian developers, Aurion, Legend of the Kori-Odan was only recently successfully funded through Kickstarter. Aside from the fact that the game is being developed by the first videogame studio in Cameroon, Aurion is exciting for the fact that the action RPG will introduce players to Central African mythology and stories. Anyone sick of hearing the same old stories recycled again and again should keep an eye out.

## THE UNIVERSIM

**DEVELOPER** CRYTIVO GAMES  
**PUBLISHER** CRYTIVO GAMES  
**DUE** "SOON"  
[theuniversim.com/the-game](http://theuniversim.com/the-game)

■ Peter Molyneux may talk big about revitalising the God Game genre, but the developers at Crytivo Games have put their money where their collective mouths are with The Universim, a game that sees the player using their godly influence (and anger if necessary) to guide a planet from birth to intelligent life to advanced civilisation and eventually galactic colonisation. Guiding a planet's evolution may be fun, but when every star in the sky is another planet to discover and explore you're on to something special.







## THUMPER

DEVELOPER DROOL  
PUBLISHER DROOL  
DUE 2016  
[drool.ws](http://drool.ws)

■ The developer's description of Thumper is unbelievably appealing – “you are a space beetle screaming towards an insane giant head from the future”. There is nothing in that sentence that is anything but awesome. Billed as a “rhythm violence” game, Thumper sees the space beetle hurtling along a neon track, seemingly jumping in time to key points of the soundtrack to fire energy as the insane giant head from the future. We're not sure though, as the bright flashing lights gave us all epileptic fits.



# Christmas Gift Guide

Christmas is a time for giving to the people you love, and who does anyone love more than themselves? Here are some ideas for gifts you might want to give to the most important person in your life – yourself.

PC

1



2



## 1 MetaBox P650RE

Price: \$1899

[www.metabox.com.au](http://www.metabox.com.au)

■ Though not the best known gaming laptop brand in Australia, Metabox manages to astound us time and time again with their beautiful made, well priced and powerful machines. Inside the P650RE base model you'll find a GTX 970M GPU, i7-6700HQ CPU, 8Gb RAM, a 15.6" 1080p IPS panel and more. If that's not enough for you, the P650RE is fully customisable with options available for pretty much every component.

3



4

## 2 Saitek HOTAS X55

Price: \$159

[www.pccasegear.com](http://www.pccasegear.com)

■ With the huge number of various space sims and flight combat games either coming out or already on the market, like Dangerous and Star Citizen, it's time you got yourself a HOTAS (Hands On Throttle d Stick) setup? Although it's nearly a decade old, the Saitek X52 is an amazing HOTAS, with precise control and enough buttons and switches for 282 programmable commands.

6



7

## 3 Tt eSports Poseidon Z RGB (Brown)

Price: \$149

[www.pccasegear.com](http://www.pccasegear.com)

■ Everyone needs a good mechanical keyboard, and for our money, the one that has the right balance of price and performance at the moment is the Poseidon Z RGB. Thermaltake use Kailh switches rather than the better known

Cherry switches, but the feel and performance of the Kailh Blue and Brown are all but identical to the better known brand.

## 4 ASUS ROG Swift PG279Q Monitor

Price: \$1199

[www.asus.com/au](http://www.asus.com/au)

■ It ain't cheap, but if you have money to burn thanks to a Christmas bonus, sweet universal gift vouchers or a lot of unwanted presents you can return, this is one of the finest gaming monitors on the market. It boasts a stupid fast refresh rate – 165Hz – 1ms response time and G-Sync that works throughout the whole range of refresh rates, from 1Hz to 165Hz.

## 5 Corsair VOID RGB Stereo

Price: \$95

[www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)

■ This headset really hits the sweet spot for price and performance, with no other sub \$100 units featuring the build quality, sound and mic of the VOID RGB Stereo. The headphones are a little bass heavy, but the mic is nice and responsive, the cans are large, and the headset as a whole is hugely comfortable and surprisingly light for something built in such a robust way.

## 6 Razer Seiren Pro

Price: From \$199

[www.pccasegear.com.au](http://www.pccasegear.com.au)

■ Looking to get into streaming, creating YouTube content, podcasting or just recording your sweet pipes for posterity?

The mic supports four different recording patterns – cardioid, stereo, bi-directional and omni – to suit most purposes and features a built in headphone amp. The mic also features an excellent high-pass filter that occludes frequency below 100Hz, cutting out environmental noise, vibration and farts. It also looks boss sitting on a desk.

## 7 MSI GS40 Phantom

Price: \$2399

[www.msi.com](http://www.msi.com)

■ When it comes to gaming laptops there are usually two distinct styles – powerful beasts that break the bank as well as your back and sound like a helicopter taking off, and light, lower specced affairs that are portable but don't really have enough grunt. The GS40 Phantom is a thin, light gaming laptop with some serious guts – an Intel 6th Gen Core i7-6700HQ CPU (quad-cores, 3.5GHz), 8GB DDR3, 128GB NVMe SSD, 1TB HDD and Nvidia GTX970M all packed into a 14", 1.6kg package.

## 8 OCZ Trion 100 240GB

Price: \$119

[www.ocz.com](http://www.ocz.com)

■ Up until recently most people were confined to having a small SSD for their OS for fast boot times and a large HDD for their storage and gaming drive. While not the fastest SSD around, the OCZ Trion 100 series hit that sweet spot on price and speed. For \$119 you can get a 240GB gaming drive for super-fast loading, and for \$229 you can jump that up to 480GB.



## 1 Dungeons & Dragons

Price: Guide books \$59.95 each  
[dnd.wizards.com/](http://dnd.wizards.com/)

■ Pen and paper RPGs are making a big comeback, so get in on the ground floor with the new edition of D&D, with refined rules that foster storytelling and creativity over cookie cutter characters. The newly streamlined rules are easy to learn and easily understood, so start killing some monsters and stealing their shit already!

## 2 Street Fighter V

Price: \$59.99 USD

[www.streetfighter.com](http://www.streetfighter.com)

■ OK, so it will be a late Christmas present, but do yourself a favour and get yourself a copy of the next iteration of the best arcade fighting game around. To make the experience even better, grab yourself a Mad Catz Arcade FightStick Tournament Edition 2 for PS4 and PS3 (that's the PC compatible one). It'll set you back around \$299, but damn it will be worth it.

## 3 The Witcher Adventure Game

Price: \$84.95

[thewitcher.com/adventuregame](http://thewitcher.com/adventuregame)

■ There isn't another Witcher game on the horizon, and aside from the upcoming DLC there seems to be little you can do to scratch your Witcher itch. Enter the board game! You and three friends can tell your own stories in the world of the Witcher, by fighting monsters, foiling intrigues and forcing the friend you like the least to play Dandelion!

## 4 Divinity: Original Sin: Enhanced Edition

Price: \$39.99 USD

[www.larian.com](http://www.larian.com)

■ With the number of AAA titles coming out in November there won't be time to play everything until the Christmas break. After you've had your fill of Star Wars and Fallout and CoD, grab yourself the new and improved version of one of last year's very best games. The Enhanced version adds thousands of fixes and improvements making a good thing even better.

## 5 Fallout Anthology: Nuke Edition

Price: \$99.95

[ebgames.com.au](http://ebgames.com.au)

■ This sweet special edition boxed set will make a fine early Christmas present for any gamer. Not only does it contain Fallout, Fallout 2, Fallout 3, New Vegas and Fallout Tactics, it also comes packaged in a mini nuke that makes bomb sounds. It's about as perfect as Fallout packaging can get. Of course, you probably won't have time to play any of the games with Fallout 4 now being available.

## 6 Just Cause 3: Collector's Edition

Price: \$189.95

[Ebgames.com.au](http://Ebgames.com.au)

■ Celebrate the fact that in his third adventure, action hero and lothario, Rico Rodriguez will have access to unlimited amounts of C4 with this neat special edition. In addition to the

game, you'll score yourself an art book, a 15" replica of Rico's trademark grappling hook and a 24"x24" map of Medici Island. The special edition also comes with a weaponised vehicle DLC pack for even more explosive mayhem.

## 7 Steam Controller

Price: TBA

[www.store.steampowered.com](http://www.store.steampowered.com)

■ There's no set price as yet (though it looks like a controller will be around \$50 USD) but Steam Controllers should go on sale by the end of the year. With fully functional Steam Machines being just around the corner and Big Picture mode slowly taking over the lounge room isn't it time you stopped trying to balance a keyboard on your lap while mousing on your thigh?

## 8 El Luchador Fantastico Grande

Price: \$34

[senyagames.hittincrits.com/](http://senyagames.hittincrits.com/)

■ Collectible card games are great, but they are both a time and money sink. Here's an Australian developed card game that's fast paced, fun and still has that tactical feel of a CCG. 2-4 players compete to be the greatest luchador (Mexican wrestler) in bouts that use tactics cards and dice rolls. Games are pretty short so you can fit one in during a lunch break rather than having to dedicate your life to a Magic game.



# GAMES

# AV



## 1 LG curved 4k OLED TV 65inch

Price: \$9999 ■ [www.lg.com/au/](http://www.lg.com/au/)

■ It's been dubbed the "King of TVs" and it's not hard to see why. Not only is the TV huge and high res, coming in at a whopping 65" with a resolution of 4096 x 2160, it also sports an OLED screen. If you've ever seen an OLED screen before you know how special that is. OLEDs allow for individual pixels to be turned on and off, making for much higher contrast, deeper, richer blacks and astonishingly crisp images.

## 2 Epson TW5300 Projector

Price: \$999 ■ [www.epson.com.au](http://www.epson.com.au)

■ It's not the greatest projector on the market, but for the price you definitely won't find anything as good as the TW5300. The image quality is excellent at 1080p, and nice and bright. Epson claims that the projector can throw out 2200 Lumens and we've seen nothing to dissuade us of the notion. Most importantly the TW5300 is cheap to run. Back in the day projector bulbs cost about \$1 per hour of globe life, but the \$350 globes of the TW5300 are rated up to a whopping 7500 hours.

## 3 Edifier Luna Eclipse stereo speakers

Price: \$299.95 ■ [www.edifier.com/au/](http://www.edifier.com/au/)

■ Treat yourself to a pair of stereo speakers that are both attractive and surprisingly powerful. The gentle curves of the design belie the power of the build in passive bass radiators that give the lower register far more grunt than is usually associated with a stereo setup, and the 19mm tweeter and 76mm woofer provide more than enough power for clear high and mid ranges. As well as a wired connection, the speakers also feature Bluetooth connectivity so you can use it as a music player with your iPod or phone.

## 4 Philips Fidelio Sound Bar

Price: \$1049.95 ■ [www.philips.com.au](http://www.philips.com.au)

■ The down side of having an enormous 65" curved TV is that you likely won't have enough room left to fit a full surround setup into your lounge room. Enter the Fidelio Sound Bar. Sound bars are an excellent compromise if you're after great surround sound but don't have room for five or seven speakers, and the Philips Fidelio is one of the best around, capable of delivering excellent, accurate 4.1/5.1 sound. It also looks damn snazzy.

## 5 NAD Viso HP 50 Headphones

Price: \$399 ■ [nadelectronics.com](http://nadelectronics.com)

■ The Viso HP50 isn't the best looking set of headphones on the market due to the kind of blocky design, but as far as sound quality goes you won't find anything quite like them for the price. Thanks to some clever technology, these closed cup headphones sound more like open back headphones, giving a more natural warmth and openness to sound. They also sport a nice flat EQ for accurate, crisp sound reproduction.

## 6 OPPO BDP-103 Universal Network 3D BD Player

Price: \$954 ■ [www.apollohifi.com.au](http://www.apollohifi.com.au)

■ Before you balk at the price tag for the OPPO player, take a look at what it does. The player supports 4k Up-Scaling, 2D-3D conversion and can read just about any format you care to mention from disk or USB, from Kodak Picture CD to FLAC. It has built in streaming features for Netflix, VUDU, Pandora and the like. It's also entirely region free for all formats, switching region dynamically without the need for any special codes or remote control voodoo.

## 7 Sound Blaster E5 DAC

Price: \$339.95 ■ [au.creative.com](http://au.creative.com)

■ This high resolution USB DAC (Digital Audio Converter) and headphone amplifier is all but a must for music lovers, but there are also enough features packaged into the device that gamers and movie lovers should definitely give it a look in too. Aside from being a high end headphone amp capable of pushing the impedance needed for high end headsets it also features a line through for a mic for high resolution recording and enough connectors for all your listening needs, from sedentary to on the move.

## 8 Logitech Harmony Elite Universal Remote

Price: \$549 ■ [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

■ Now that you have a new TV, BD player, sound bar and projector you're going to need something capable of controlling them all lest you want to die in an unfortunate remote control avalanche while trying to change the channel. The Harmony Elite is far from being cheap, but it's easily the most user friendly and powerful universal remote we've seen. It's easy to connect to pretty much any device you can think of and sports everything you could need right out of the box.



## 1 The Powerpuff Girls: The Complete Series

Price: \$69.95 ■ [www.madman.com.au](http://www.madman.com.au)

■ Yes, it's a kid's show featuring the exploits of three little girls with superpowers, but it's also a wonderfully savvy, beautifully conceived pop-culture pastiche (and prequel to Samurai Jack) that can be enjoyed by animation lovers of any age. The first four seasons, thanks to the efforts of supervising producer and legendary animator Genndy Tartakovsky are better than the final two seasons, but that said, of the 78 episodes there are hardly any duds.

## 2 Doctor Who: 10 Christmas Specials

Price: \$44.95 ■ [www.roadshow.com.au](http://www.roadshow.com.au)

■ What better way to celebrate Christmas than by doing it with the Doctor? Like it says on the box, the Doctor Who: 10 Christmas Specials boxed set features all 10 Christmas specials released so far, so you can spend the season aboard the space Titanic, battling killer Christmas Trees and Santas, fighting the Rachnoss, the Sycorax, the Wooden King and Queen, the Cybermen and more. Be sure to have you wits and sonic screwdriver handy.

## 3 Thing Explainer

Price: \$35 ■ [www.hachette.com.au](http://www.hachette.com.au)

■ Randall Munroe, the creator of XKCD and author of What If? returns with a new book that uses simple words to explained complex things. Discover all the parts of a "shared space house", why cells are really just "tiny bags of water you're made of" or the function of all the "bags of stuff inside you". Like Munroe's web comic and previous book, thing explainer is at once silly and very clever.

## 4 Metalocalypse Seasons 1-4 + Doomstar Requiem

Price: \$89.95 ■ [www.madman.com.au](http://www.madman.com.au)

■ Follow the adventures of the biggest, most important and most violent band in the known universe, Dethklok, as they face fans, infighting, idealism, fascism, self-doubt, rampant stupidity, mumbling, groupies, gratuitous nudity and violence in the most metal animated series ever made. The boxed set contains all four released seasons as well as the "Klok Opera" Doomstar Requiem, and a host of special features including hidden backstories and William Murderface calling an escort.

## 5 Supernatural Seasons 1-10 Boxed Set

Price: \$219 (BD), \$169 (DVD)

[www.roadshow.com.au](http://www.roadshow.com.au)

■ Over 10 seasons Supernatural has not only gone past its own ending (the show has a built in finale but was renewed for more seasons) but has managed to thrive thanks to a growing self-awareness and willingness to make fun of its premise – two brothers with daddy issues hunting monsters. Through the 10 seasons, the brothers take on pretty much any supernatural evil you can think of, up to and including "Winchest" slash fiction.

## 6 The X-Files: The Collector's Set BD

Price: \$350 ■ [www.jbhifi.com.au](http://www.jbhifi.com.au)

■ For the first time ever of Blu-Ray and just in time for the new series in 2016 comes this massive boxed set featuring everything X-Files. The 57 disk set (you read that right) features all nine seasons of the show as well as the two movies, Fight the Future and I Want to Believe as well as over 23 hours of special features, ranging from documentaries to deleted scenes, audio commentaries and more. The only way you could get more X-Files in a box is if you somehow managed to trap David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson in a fridge.

## 7 Spartacus: The Complete Series BD

Price: \$74.95 ■ [www.jbhifi.com.au](http://www.jbhifi.com.au)

■ So packed full of slow motion gore and copious nudity, Spartacus seems like an idiotic good time, but it actually tells a great story full of love, betrayal, honour, destiny, hubris, retribution and all those good things. The boxed set contains all three main seasons as well as the spinoff season, Gods of the Arena that works as a prequel. Trust us, it's great. Or you could just watch it to see what Xena looks like naked.

## 8 Lex Luthor: Man of Steel Trade Paperback

Price: \$29.99 ■ [www.randomhouse.com.au](http://www.randomhouse.com.au)

■ Told through his eyes, Lex Luthor: Man of Steel delves into the reasons why Luthor has chosen to be the mortal enemy of Superman – he genuinely wants to save the human race from an untrustworthy, all too powerful alien. Writer Brian Azzarello has experience writing villain stories thanks to his work on Joker, and his words mesh beautifully with the art of Lee Bermejo.



# ENTERTAINMENT



# HOTWARE CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE

with  
Terrence  
Jarrad

Don't know what to buy your partner/relative/cat this Christmas? Look no further! We've put together this handy gift guide, thinking long and hard about what to include so you don't have to! (Note: your cat will probably not appreciate any of these gifts. Or anything you ever do.)

## LIKE < \$100

### 01 PSN/XBLive Subscription

Price: \$34+ ■ Distributor: Microsoft/Sony  
[www.ebgames.com.au](http://www.ebgames.com.au)

One of the easiest things you can get for someone with a console is a subscription card to their online service, as even if they already have one, they can add the time on the end of the existing subscription.

**POWERED UP:** Gives access to free games monthly, enables online features and play for relevant games, and is available in blocks of three or 12 months to suit your budget.

**PLAYED OUT:** "Easy" doesn't always mean "thoughtful", but if your recipient is unappreciative of this kind of gift, next year give them a lump of coal.

### 02 Warhammer: End Times - Vermintide

Price: \$40 ■ Distributor: Steam  
[www.steampowered.com](http://www.steampowered.com)

'Tis the season to be jolly, and little evokes jolliness like pinning a rat-man Gatling gunner to a wall with an arrow.

**POWERED UP:** This is pretty much Left 4 Dead dressed up in medieval garb, but with some nifty RPG/crafting/inventory management aspects. It's a game that requires teamwork and coordination, and cheap enough that you should consider getting a copy for yourself too.

**PLAYED OUT:** Remains to be seen whether people will still be playing in a few months.

### 03 The Walking Dead Books

Price: \$48.95 ■ Distributor: Kings Comics  
[www.kingscomics.com](http://www.kingscomics.com)

What better gift to give than a comic book about zombies, on the birthday of history's most famous zombie?

**POWERED UP:** The comics that inspired the TV series, featuring the characters you know from TV, but with a storyline that differs slightly. Each of these books compiles multiple individual comic issues into one hardback, with additional notes from the author.

**PLAYED OUT:** Recipient will gain the ability to say "the book was better" during every episode of the show. Oh, and not one for the kiddies – these books go places the show doesn't.

### 04 Google Chromecast

Price: \$49 ■ Distributor: Google  
[www.jbhifi.com.au](http://www.jbhifi.com.au)

The Chromecast has been out for a while but makes a nice little stocking stuffer. It allows you to throw the display from PC, tablet, or mobile, to your TV.

**POWERED UP:** After a simple set up, cast YouTube, Netflix, Stan, Google Play, and others to your TV. Great for when turning on a console just to watch Netflix seems like too much effort.

**PLAYED OUT:** With app makers creating apps for multiple platforms – e.g. Netflix has apps on consoles, TVs, media players, all of which connect through the TV already – the useful application of the Chromecast is slowly diminishing.

### 05 Star Wars Battlefront

Price: \$89.99 ■ Distributor: EA  
[www.ea.com/au](http://www.ea.com/au)

Everybody loves Star Wars, so the only way this wouldn't be a good present is if the recipient already owns it.

**POWERED UP:** Epic battles of rebel vs empire troops. Fly X-Wings and TIE fighters. Pilot Imperial walkers. Play as Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. In short, this game recreates just about every Star Wars fantasy a fan could ask for, in exquisite detail. For bonus points, let them open this present early.

**PLAYED OUT:** Bit of a levelling/unlock grind. Also you may never see the person you give this to again.

### 06 X-Wing Silk Tie

Price: \$99 ■ Distributor: ThinkGeek  
[www.thinkgeek.com](http://www.thinkgeek.com)

It's hard to stand out in the corporate dress of the business world, so give someone you know the gift of individuality this Christmas with a tie (not TIE) declaring their love of Star Wars and support of the Rebel Alliance.

**POWERED UP:** 100% silk handmade in Italy.

**PLAYED OUT:** It'd be really awkward if you wore it to an interview and the interviewer was wearing and Imperial themed tie.





07



08



09



10



11

## LOVE < \$500

### 07 Roku 4

Price: \$190 • Distributor: Roku  
[www.roku.com](http://www.roku.com)

Designed for use with Ultra HD TVs, the Roku 4 will always display the best picture quality your screen can handle, and is capable of delivering 4K content from just about every streaming service you can think of at up to 60 frames per second.

**POWERED UP:** Voice command search. The remote also has a headphone jack so can watch Twilight without bothering the rest of the household.

**PLAYED OUT:** Likely requires a VPN service (not to mention multiple streaming subscriptions) to get the most out of it.

### 08 Elgato Game Capture HD60 Pro

Price: \$269 • Distributor: Elgato  
[www.pccasegear.com](http://www.pccasegear.com)

Streaming is what all the cool kids are doing these days and while there are a number of devices out there to assist, Elgato has one of the biggest names (and reputation) in the field.

**POWERED UP:** Capture game footage via HDMI pass-through at up to 1080p @60FPS, ready to stream to Twitch and competing services.

**PLAYED OUT:** This card is a PCIe x1 so is

designed to be used inside a PC, though Elgato also makes external units better suited for use with consoles.

### 09 Pebble Time Round

Price: \$355 • Distributor: Pebble  
[www.pebble.com](http://www.pebble.com)

Most smartwatches look very... smart.. watch..y. This design from Pebble is more classical, more – dare we say it – timeless.

**POWERED UP:** Looks less like a blob of tech and more like a timepiece. Up to two days charge, and 15 mins quick charge will see you good for about a day. A built in mic, so you can talk into your wrist like a spy/loon. Step/activity/sleep tracking capabilities.

**PLAYED OUT:** Two days is a downgrade from previous Pebble watches, but it's still better than Apple's offering and is about a third of the weight.

### 10 Rider Jacket

Price: \$270 • Distributor: Musterbrand  
[www.musterbrand.com](http://www.musterbrand.com)

We love Musterbrand designs. They are stylish, and thematic to the game they reference, but without blaring "THIS IS A GAME REFERENCE" at onlookers; the subtlety is most welcome.

**POWERED UP:** The Rider jacket is part of the Deus Ex Collection (for the upcoming Mankind Divided), featuring the triangular Deus Ex patterns, as well as the black and gold colour scheme. Delivery is fast for in stock items and customer service is excellent.

**PLAYED OUT:** Buying clothes online can be a bit of a lucky dip when it comes to sizing, however we've found the sizing charts to be on point. YMMV, of course.

### 11 Bose QuietComfort 25

Price: \$399 • Distributor: Bose  
[www.bose.com.au](http://www.bose.com.au)

The QuietComfort headphone series from Bose are sublime, and suit discerning ears whether on planes, public transport, or even just working in the office.

**POWERED UP:** Excellent noise cancelling, a deep and layered audio output, and up to 35 hours of listening pleasure on a single AAA battery. Also in a change from previous iterations, the QC25s allow you to listen (without noise cancelling) once the battery dies!

**PLAYED OUT:** There are actually two versions, with the only difference being the inline mic/remote connector that allows you to take hands free calls; one made for iPhone, the other for Android.



## WORSHIP > \$500

### 12 Keurig Kold

Price: \$520 ■ Distributor: Keurig  
[www.keurig.com](http://www.keurig.com)

Australian summers are not the winter wonderland the carols tell us about, but rather, are raging infernos. The Keurig Kold then, is the perfect Australian Christmas gift.

**POWERED UP:** Cold drinks at the touch of a button, with brand name soft drink as well! Various Coke products, Tierney's iced teas, and Flyte sports drinks, all come out at a chilled 3.8 degrees in around 90 seconds and no CO2 canister required.

**PLAYED OUT:** Does require custom Keurig pods to produce the drinks however, so expect ongoing costs.

### 13 PlayStation 4 1TB

Price: \$549+ ■ Distributor: Sony  
[www.jbhifi.com.au](http://www.jbhifi.com.au)

The current cream of the console crop, with more interesting exclusive games, the PS4

is the console to get for the gamer looking diversify from 100% PC interests.

**POWERED UP:** There's a 1TB HDD version out now, which is double the previous 500GB maximum. Otherwise, deals with limited editions and bundled games change frequently, so shop around retailers for the package you think your giftee would like best.

**PLAYED OUT:** The 500GB HDD version is still on sale sometimes at the exact same price as the 1TB.

### 14 NVIDIA GTX 980Ti

Price: \$1050-1300 ■ Distributor: NVidia  
[www.scorptec.com.au](http://www.scorptec.com.au)

If you know someone in need of a video card upgrade and have the cash to spare, this gift should ensure tears of gratitude for months to come.

**POWERED UP:** The 980Ti is one of the best cards on the market, and whether you go for a base "reference" style model, or splurge on something factory overclocked and sporting

a gigantic custom cooler, you'll be getting impressive performance.

**PLAYED OUT:** If you don't know the system you're buying for you might need to research a little first!

### 15 Microsoft Surface Pro 4

Price: \$1349+ ■ Distributor: Microsoft  
[www.microsoftstore.com/au](http://www.microsoftstore.com/au)

Laptops are generally fairly awful to lug around all day, which is why the Surface Pro 4 weighing in at less than 800g is such a relief to Santa, who's probably carrying thousands of these things.

**POWERED UP:** 12.3 inch touchscreen, running Windows 10 Pro, this tablet can indeed replace your PC.\* The base model has a 128GB SSD and 4GB RAM, and you can customise up to 512GB SSD and 16GB RAM.

**PLAYED OUT:** \*Assuming that PC isn't used as a primary gaming machine. The top end model clocks in at \$3399, making it one pricey pressie.



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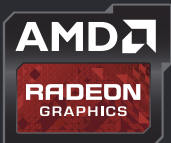


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# STAR POWER

25 badasses battle to  
save the last light  
in the universe

Battleborn

DEVELOPER GEARBOX SOFTWARE  
PUBLISHER 2K  
DUE FEBRUARY 9, 2016  
[battleborn.com](http://battleborn.com)







Since it's made by roughly the same team that brought us the incredible *Borderlands 2*, expectations for *Battleborn* are sky high. Recently we had the chance to test the game out and talk with the creative director of the game Randy Varnell.

Three game modes and 15 characters were made available to us as well as other assorted press and YouTubers. Keyboard and mouse are our preferred control option but Xbox One controllers were at hand so we tested both options and it was obvious that Gearbox has spent considerable time optimizing the game for use with a controller with every button including the D-Pad being used to control the fast action. Regardless of chosen control scheme, if you have played *Borderlands 2*, or any shooter for that matter, there is little to no learning curve.

The first thing you do in the game, regardless of game mode, is bring up the Helix upgrade system and choose your first augmentation skill - a special attack. The Helix has two strands with 10 options to spec your character on the go, and once a mission or multiplayer session is over the Helix resets and you have to do it all over again. This adds pressure to the intense gameplay as you naturally want access to the character's most powerful abilities but have to earn them on every single mission. In addition to the

Helix system there is a more traditional ranking system where XP is earned in the campaign or in online matches, with the promise of more persistent rewards in the future.

Rather than aping the loot drops of *Borderlands 2*, the weapons for all characters are preset and additional loot comes in the form of loot containers the player can buy with a game currency. The price decides the rarity of the loot, and once opened the player receives emblems with stat boosters. Three boosters can be equipped at any time, with any leftover being stored in the bank. These

#### DEFENDERS OF THE UNIVERSE

In *Battleborn*, five distinctly different factions are forced to work together in order to save the last remaining planets and the last remaining star. To do this they have to defeat an evil Alien race from another dimension and ex hero Lothar Rendain who now works for the enemy.

boosters are not active, but rather need to be activated using Shards, another currency players can find in the levels. Shards are also needed to activate various in game items and objects, like health dispensers, turret bases, drones that fight on your side, and the like.

What has not changed is the incredible sense of humor and self-awareness we grew to love in *Borderlands*, all brought to life by quality writing and incredible voice acting. During our co-op session this included constant verbal abuse by the quest giver and the Alien baddy commenting on how well we fought





and praising us on our looks after killing a mid-level boss. The end boss in our session was hilarious as well, and consisted of a huge spider robot with his own hilarious lines. Every time we did sufficient damage he searched for better firmware in order to beat us. The humor even extends to the versus modes. I managed a 5 kill streak against a player from the opposing team and my character (Montana) shouted, "Go on rage quit, I know you want to".

Graphics are of course the first thing you notice and Battleborn, with its distinct art style and over the top characters definitely does not disappoint. What screenshots can't show you though is the incredible animation. From Hyperius' (Gundam style robot) aerial attacks to Miko (Sentient mushroom) throwing kunai knives or his healing powers the animation impresses. Not only has Gearbox designed some really out of this world characters for the game, they also managed to bring them to life by having them move in a way that feels right how they look. This quality extends to the rest of the game, with incredibly animated enemies, environments, explosions, you name it.

Introducing the most violent movie Pixar has ever made



■ ■ To my surprise most people were choosing the Xbox One controller over the keyboard and mouse yet had no problem keeping up ■ ■

The co-op mission we played is called The Algorithm - a pun itself considering the objective of the mission - and while great fun in its own right it is hard to judge how the final story mode will hold up over a huge campaign that has to keep peoples interest over dozens of hours. From there on we moved over to the multiplayer, two were at hand. The first one was called Capture, and in this case the name speaks for itself. Two teams of five players spawn on opposite sides of the map and have to capture 3 spots, 1 every captured location gives points. The first team to reach 1000 points wins the game. It's a fairly standard mode obviously made to appeal to competitive FPS players. For my first game I decided on Reyna



because I like the way she looks, but as it turned out someone from my team had chosen her a split second before me and the game does not allow duplicate characters in the same team. To my surprise most people were choosing the Xbox One controller over the keyboard and mouse yet had no problem keeping up with people who did not. Those who could not keep up were the ones who upon leveling forgot to use their Helix skill tree and in a game mode that takes roughly half an hour per session it is extremely important as you will be

PEWPEWPEW

Born feels like a person despite that we magic, arrows

and lots of other things you do not have in your typical shooter. In fact there are even characters in the game that have no projectile attacks at all. Boldur for instance (far left) is entirely melee based.

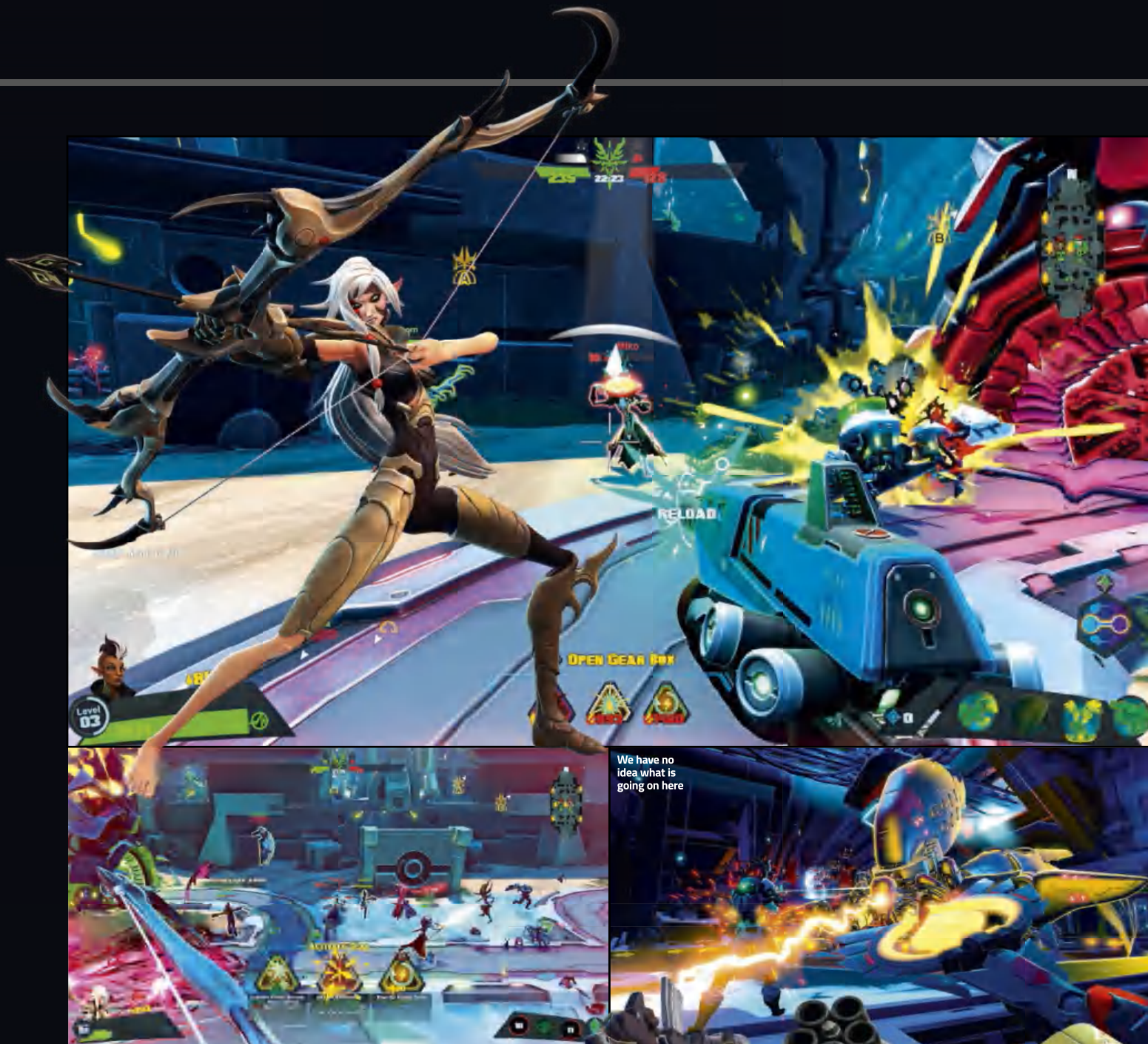


Falcon Punch!



The robot grinder





getting new attacks and abilities every few minutes.

After Capture we tried out Meltdown and this was by far my favorite of the two competitive modes we got to try. It even has its own back story. The story goes that an Artificial Intelligence unit in charge of recycling robots went bonkers and now thinks he is a robotic volcano God, and as such demands sacrifice. In this game mode both teams have bases that spawn robots that safely have to reach recycle grinders, the bigger the robot the more points you get. Reach 250 points and the grinders move further away making it harder to reach them, reach 500 and you win. This brings in a lot of tactical play as there are now several things to

take into account, keep your minions alive until they reach the grinder, destroying the opponent minions and the opponents themselves. Here the importance of gathering shards became evident as well, as with them we could activate turrets that helped us decimate our opponents. It was a testament to the quality of this mode that 3 hours passed without us even realizing that the session was coming to an end.

After the extended play session we can say one thing for sure, Battleborn feels like a classic shooter and at this point shows huge potential. We will see on the 9th of February 2016 if the game can fulfill said potential.

#### BFF

Some of the characters have special relationships in the game. Oscar Montana for instance like each other because they are both military men. These special relationships manifest themselves with funny interactions in the campaign as well as in online competitive play.



## Q&A Creative Director for Battleborn, Randy Varnell spills the beans

**When did you start development on the game?**

I was design producer on Borderlands 2 so I transitioned from Borderlands 2 to Battleborn. Back then we had a small team working on Battleborn immediately after Borderlands 2 but right now almost everyone working at Gearbox is involved. So let me ask you a question, what did you think of what you played today?

**The first time I played the game months ago (the E3 demo) I felt like it was a re-skinned Borderlands. The game shares a lot of DNA with Borderlands but it is different. They feel complementary side by side.**

That's good to hear, with Battleborn we wanted to do a lot of things we were not able to with Borderlands, like the character variety, multiplayer which did not really fit into the Borderlands universe but yeah style and color, humor those things are very important for us so they do share that DNA.

**Yeah the game is certainly colorful, it looks and sounds great. I assume you guys are using Audiokinetic's Wwise for the sound again, did you guys make the switch to Unreal 4?**

Wwise for audio absolutely, for the graphics however we use Unreal 3 but heavily modified, there are some elements from Unreal 4 in there but we have our own design tools in there and a lot of things we developed during Borderlands 2. It's really heavily modified to suit the needs of our games, I couldn't tell you in percentages but we really reworked a lot of the engine so it would fit our needs.

**Was that because development was started years ago or is there another reason?**

Well we threw out Unreal Script and Kismet for instance in favor of our own visual script called CONSTRUCT. We developed that tool set before Borderlands 2, improved it immensely for Borderlands 2 and it was used for Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel. We use it in different projects within Gearbox and that tool set is so good for our designers, it really empowers rapid prototyping, which is important when you are dealing with so many characters. It allows us to get characters and gameplay in there quickly and test out what works.

**You mentioned rapid prototyping which is obviously needed when you are dealing with 25 distinct characters each with their own physics models, abilities and play styles. How do you make the competitive modes balanced?**

When we started the project 3 years ago we knew that we wanted to make competitive multiplayer a big focus in this game, we knew we wanted lots of characters and again work with procedurally generated gear. With Borderlands 2 we did not have to care about it that much because your gear was tied to your level and there was no competitive mode, so we had to get a lot more serious about that. There are two different strategies we use for that. First we play the game almost every day and then discuss what we played - does this movement or that attack feel right - and we deal with the subjective balance that way. Secondly is the architecture we started with Borderlands 2 that gathers all the statistics in the game; how fast something is moving, how much damage is being dealt, where on



**When we started the project 3 years ago we knew that we wanted to make competitive multiplayer a big focus in this game**

the map fights happen, how characters fare against each other and literally hundreds and hundreds of statistics that allow us to constantly fine tune the experience. We have 3 archetypes in the game - attackers, defenders and supporters - and within that range we tune all of them slightly differently. I could really go on about all the ways we tune and balance the game. It is really important to us. I also realize we will not have it perfect at launch, no multiplayer game ever is when competitive play is involved, so we will be very aggressive in supporting the game from launch with balance and content patches.

**Talking about content, some of the DLC for Borderlands 2 is bigger than many full games sold at full price, are you planning to support Battleborn the same way?**

(laughs) Thanks, I um obviously cannot comment on that except to say look at what we did with Borderlands, and I am not even close to running out of ideas for this game. We have tons of ideas for other characters, new game modes and story. I would love to but it is a new IP, and you never know how the public perceives it, so it depends on how successful the game gets I guess. I would love to but obviously I cannot announce anything right now.

**Talking specifically about the campaign, the ones we have played so far were all similar in length and the pacing at times was relentless. Is this what we can expect for the final game?**

We are still working on the pacing and our story missions are between 30 and 45 minutes

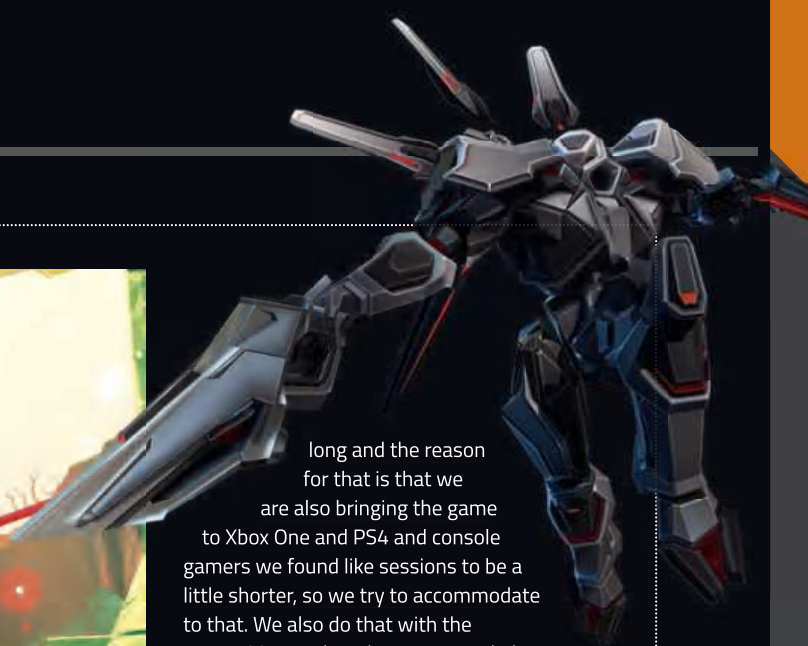






#### LOTHAR

The main bad guy in Battleborn is a man called Lothar Rendain. Lothar, as the story goes, initially fought to save the last star just like our heroes, only to change his mind when invading aliens from another universe offered him a Faustian deal.



long and the reason for that is that we are also bringing the game to Xbox One and PS4 and console gamers we found like sessions to be a little shorter, so we try to accommodate to that. We also do that with the competitive modes where we try to balance games out so they are roughly 30 minutes long. You also have to consider that the game at times can be intense, so half an hour or so you can sit in the lobby, check your gear that sort of thing.

#### With the Helix system, why the lack of permanent skill points? First we get them then we lose them again.

I wouldn't say lose them, more a chance to respect your character all the time. In Borderlands we loved that you could play with the talent trees and looking at it we wanted to make a game out of that. It allows the player to tune a character exactly the way they want, or the way they need for your co-op buddies online. We do have a regular ranking system in place as well, and that will open up even more gameplay options. We call those mutations and there are 5 of them. This opens up a third line in your Helix. It does not necessarily make you more powerful but it gives you even more options to tackle the game with.

#### So that is the more traditional ranking system

Well yeah we all like games that acknowledge the time we spend with them so it was important for us that the game had such a ranking system in place on top of the Helix system.

#### Our time is almost up so last question and a light heart-ed one so going back to the DNA thing, big guy Montana looks a lot like Mr Torgue. Any relation?

(laughs) I am sorry I have to disappoint you but no, the two games are separate universes. There is a link with Mr Torgue though, but not like you would expect. Our bad guy for Battleborn is called Lothar Rendain, and I did not know this when we were choosing voices but he is voiced by Chris Rager and he also did Mr Torgue. This guy has an incredible range as a voice actor, so when I heard the voice we were like "yeah that is the one we want", only to find out afterward that he had previously also voiced Mr Torgue.

#### I had no idea.

Yeah now that I told you that you will probably hear it but this guy really is an incredible voice actor. **HASAN ALI ALMACI/PC**

# Smoke on the Water

More blue than Deep Purple

## The Flame in the Flood

DEVELOPER THE MOLASSES FLOOD

PUBLISHER STEAM

DUE MARCH 2016

[www.themolassesflood.com/the-flame-in-the-flood](http://www.themolassesflood.com/the-flame-in-the-flood)

Not so long ago, games were all about mechanics and graphics. Last decade, a generic shooter could get rave reviews by virtue of new-fangled rag-doll physics or custom shaders alone. An old-school sprite-based RPG could score big thanks to an unusual third faction or streamlined resource-gathering system. Games were, with some exceptions, clever contrivances to facilitate play.

Now we're in a new age. An age where the actual gamey part of the game might not be the most important thing about it. Like a short film or a piece of sculpture, or a minimalist novel, or any of a hundred other kinds of art, a game can simply evoke a sense of... something. Raw emotion, if you will.

That's what the Flame in the Flood does. Ostensibly a rogue-lite, the game follows the misadventures of a girl named Scout and a dog named Aesop as they travel down an endless river. The weather is bad, apocalyptically bad, and the river is high and wild. There's a sense that we are post- something. Or maybe even post-everything. Buildings are ruined, powerlines down. There's little sign of violence though, aside from the violence dished out by nature of course. Rainstorms

sweep the river, lightning flickers, and wolves slink through the shadows.

Even in its current Early Access state with no campaign mode, the Flame in the Flood is punishing. A single mis-punt of the raft can break Scout's leg against a ruined wharf. Drinking dirty water introduces virulent infection. Cold saps energy. And the ultimate irony in this flooded world: thirst is a constant companion.

Like any crafting/survival game, Scout must collect items and combine them to make useful tools. Splints, primitive antibiotics, better clothing, upgrades for the raft, it's all here. She starts each run of the river eating cattails and mulberries, but soon has enough kit to make snares and bag a few rabbits. Inventory management becomes a major challenge.

The rhythm of the game is simple: hop on the raft, navigate the river (sometimes the swift waters flow deep and smooth, other time huge rapids span the river bank-to-bank), come upon a dock or wharf and hop off the raft to explore on foot.

The developer speaks of "biomes" but at this stage the game appears to be made up of small pre-fabricated areas in various environmental



Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Me!

themes - wilderness, small town, ruined industrial etc - and there are a few specialised areas such as upgrade workshops for the raft or a market to trade resources. The mix of resources in each area changes for each run of the game.

A nice touch: once Scout inevitably succumbs to the river and drowns, freezes, dies of thirst or gets eaten by wolves, the game displays a map. Each key point on Scout's journey is highlighted with an icon - here's where she slept in an ancient school bus. Here's where she broke her leg trying to salvage a shopping-trolley full of water filters.

A short but intriguing scene right at the start where Scout tries to tune an old radio hints at a richer campaign mode that is yet to be rolled out. But even now, the Flame in the Flood is a haunting, challenging and even a little disturbing world in which to wander. The sense of loss it evokes is intense, and weirdly more-ish. **ANTHONY FORDHAM PC**





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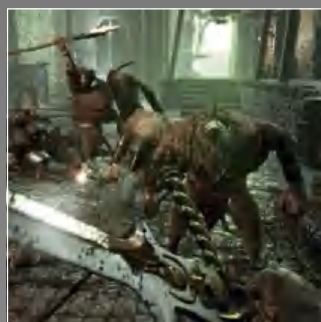
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# Games

## YOUR GUIDE TO PC GAMES



**T**he RPG is very much alive and well, this issue - and we still have Fallout 4 to look forward to!

Thankfully, this gap has allowed us to get some good time in with what, in another time, would be some incredibly addicting games. Swordcoast Legends and Original Sin Enhanced addition offer hundreds of hours of gameplay between them, so they may not save the Fallout-4-pocalypse. Life is Strange is not out and complete, and much more digestible, so that's a plus. And while it's not an RPG per se - though it does come from a very rich RPG setting - Vermintide is not only even better than we were hoping, it's short, sharp chunks of action should make for a good tension breaker from what we are assuming will be a long sojourn in the wastelands.

Of course, there is the elephant in the radioactive room...

What do we do if Fallout 4 sucks? Well, I guess we'll go back to Divinity. Or keep aiming toward getting better gear in Vermintide.

There's always something to play...

**David Hollingworth**  
Digital Editor

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- 63** Life Is Strange S1
- 64** Rebel Galaxy



**SCORING SYSTEM** | PCPP scores its games on a 1 to 10 scale. The higher, the better – though 10 is by no means a “perfect” game. We’re not convinced such a thing exists, so consider a 10 a masterpiece of PC gaming, despite its inevitable flaws. A 5 is a decidedly average game; one that doesn’t excel in any particular area, without being an affront to our senses – the ultimate in mediocrity. Below this, you’ll start to find the games our reviewers suffered an aneurysm getting through; above it, the titles truly worth your time and money. And remember: a score is only a vague indication of quality. Always read the full review for the definitive opinion!

WE  
PLAY  
ON:



**ALIENWARE**  
GAME VICTORIOUS



**ORIGIN**





# Warhammer: Vermintide – The End Times

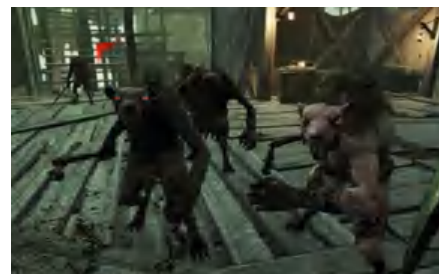
Rats to the left of me, rats to the right of me...

DEVELOPER FATSHARK  
PUBLISHER GAMES WORKSHOP  
PRICE \$29.99  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
[www.vermintide.com](http://www.vermintide.com)

**B**efore we dive into the meat of this review, I should probably point out that I have quite the history with Games Workshop's Warhammer fantasy world. When I was young'un, I pushed painted plastic soldiers around a tabletop, before graduating to roleplaying in the dark and gritty Old World in the excellent first edition of Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay. So I know the setting pretty well.

It's also a setting that few games have really managed to get right. And while we're all hoping that Creative Assembly can do just that with the epic Total War: Warhammer, Swedish studio Fatshark has brought the Warhammer world to life on a much more intimate scale, with the implausibly named Warhammer: Vermintide – The End Times.

The name ticks a lot of boxes, and not all of them are now all that relevant. The End Times event was a cataclysmic series of changes to the established and decades old setting of the Old World that ended with its destruction; a whole new game and setting was released this



year that was the successor, so anyone getting into Vermintide and wanting to play some Tabletop Warhammer will miss out.

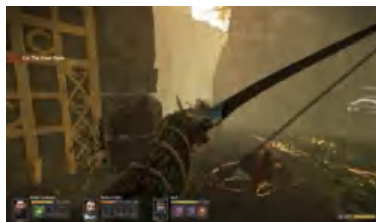
Warhammer is obvious, and Vermintide... well, play the game for a few minutes, get almost literally buried under a pile of stinking ratmen, and you'll see it's pretty much a spot on descriptor.

Vermintide takes place in the city of Ubersreik, a sprawling town in the Riekland of the Empire. Think a very gothic, fantastic version of Germany in the high middle-ages, all puffed-and-slashed doublets, greatswords, and rudimentary black-powder weapons. The

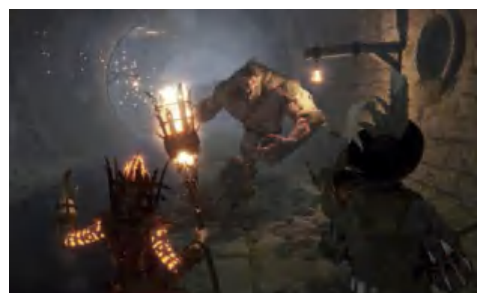
Empire is a place of nearly endless, dangerous forests, so its towns and cities tend to be cramped, walled, and come complete with a ready siege mentality.

Which turns out to be handy, because the game begins with Ubersreik under siege. But it's no conventional army attacking; rather, it's the once-thought mythical Skaven, human-sized vermin that tunnel beneath the world's surface, and utilise all kinds of twisted magic and technology to extend its underground realm. They've stormed up out of the sewers and taken the town by surprise, so that only small pockets of resistance now hold out.





Grenades are rare, you can only ever carry one, and they are lots of fun



Which is where you – and three complete strangers/mates – come in. From your base at the Red Moon Inn, its innkeeper tasks you with missions about and around the town. Go here, save some food; go there, destroy a Skaven thingy; explore the sewers and just kill lots and lots of giant bipedal rats.

Vermintide is – essentially – Left 4 Dead with an interesting new re-skin and weapons.

However, don't for a minute think that this is meant to be a reductive take on the game. If you'd ask me before Vermintide came out if a fantasy version of L4D would be cool, I'd say hell yeah, and if you told me it was going to be Warhammer, I'd be having a little nerdgasm. It's a legitimately solid concept, and it's one that Fatshark has executed admirably well.

It's also taken the concept further, by adding different character types, changing the focus from ranged weapons to melee (though ranged weapons are still very effective), and delivering a remarkably addictive loot and semi-crafting system. If you thought L4D was addictive, you'll be all over Vermintide like a Halfling on a crate of sticky-buns.

There are five available characters, each with their own backstory and weapon-sets. The Empire Soldier and Witch-hunter both use an array of large hammers and black powder weapons, while the Dwarven Ranger gets more



## ■ Vermintide is – essentially – Left 4 Dead with an interesting new re-skin and weapons ■

### WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You really, really want to hurt a lot of rats.

+ Left 4 Dead didn't have enough zweihanders.

+ You can't wait for Total Warhammer

axes, as well as crossbows and pistols and some pretty nasty guns that are effectively small flamethrowers. The Bright Mage is very interesting – a fire wizard with a range of direct and area attacks, and a mechanic that sees her at threat of blowing herself up the more she uses her powers. Then there's my personal favourite, the Wood-elf Waywatcher. She brings a range of fast bows and slicing knives and swords to the table, and tends to have arguably the highest rate of fire.

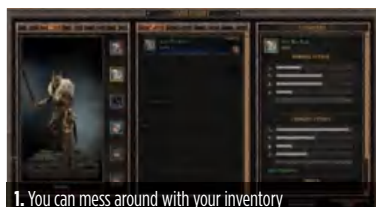
One of the things that keeps the game fresh is seeing the different mixes of characters – you'll only ever have four out of the five, and the canned banter between characters is also rather enjoyable. You'll discover

that the wizard and the witch-hunter have a history together, and not a good one; the dwarf uses a lot of his native language, and thankfully the game's loading tips include a good smattering of dwarvish words. The uniqueness of the weapon sets and play styles, on top of the banter and different character combinations, provides a freshness that the game's 14 maps may not otherwise supply.

That said, those 14 maps are all very well-realised, though some are on the small, and therefore somewhat repetitive side. They range from maps set in and around the city, all leaning buildings, gabled roofs, and dank cobblestones, to ones set outside Ubersreik, complete with farms, forests,

### SEQUENCE

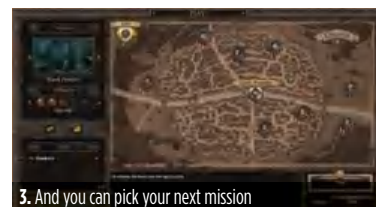
#### THINGS TO DO IN THE RED MOON INN



1. You can mess around with your inventory

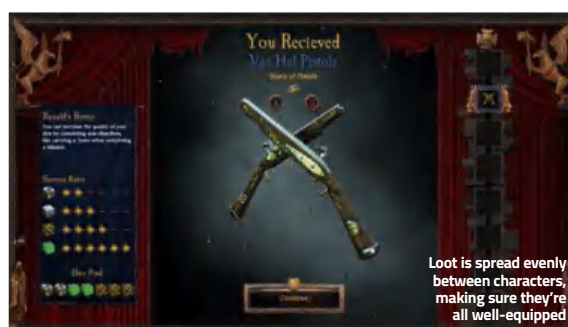


2. You can make new items from olds ones



3. And you can pick your next mission





## FURBALL

**1.** The UI does a good job of letting you know when companions are in trouble

**2.** Ammunition is pretty rare, and you will run out

**3.** It can be very handy to keep track of who has what - especially healing kits

**4.** When Skaven swarm, attacks come from all around you

**5.** Vermintide does not shy away from blood and gore

**6.** Stormvermin are just one of the elite types you'll face, but definitely the most heavily armoured

and piles of dead civilians. Some of the most challenging maps are those set underground, since here it's actually much easier to become cut off from your allies. But they all capture the feel of the Old World wonderfully, utilising designs and aesthetics straight from the models of the tabletop game itself.

These maps are plenty atmospheric even empty, but get the game's AI director to start throwing Skaven at you, and they become downright terrifying. Like L4D, this AI 'chooses' when best to throw a horde of easy to kill slave-rats at you, or when to send in a lumbering Rat Ogre. All the usual enemy types are there, plus a few new ones. The man-catching Packrat pulls party members helplessly away, while

Poison Wind Globadiers pepper the map with areas of stinking, poisonous gas. But you've also got the Ratling Gunner, who targets one party member and guns for them no matter what - and doesn't care if it guns down hordes of his own fellows.

Possibly the tensest of the special enemies are the intermittent Stormvermin patrols. These heavily armed and armoured Skaven march in a column of eight or so, to a particular chittery cadence. If you hide, they may pass you by, and if you get into a fight with them it will be tough. So it's always handy to keep a grenade handy.

The game's equipment includes not only each characters' two signature weapons, but healing potions, strength

and speed potions, and explosive and incendiary grenades. Ammunition (unless you have a magic item - I'm looking askance at you, dwarf and wizard) is limited, too, so when you find an ammo stash it's a thing of joy.

In fact, that pretty much sums up the game. It's a rat-blood-spattered, chaotic, and ultimately very fulfilling game, that manages action and excitement, with the ever-expectant promise of bigger and better weapons, while also living up to a very rich setting.

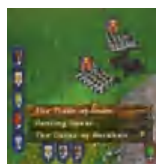
In fact, it just may be the best Warhammer game yet published, and if Fatshark can keep the game fresh it's one that's going to be hard to put down. **DAVID HOLLINGWORTH PC**

## OR TRY THIS:



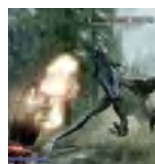
### LEFT 4 DEAD TURTLE ROCK STUDIOS 2008

- ▲ Zombies, the thing you love to kill!
- ▼ No hats with feathers in them.



### WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNEDED RAT MINDSCAPE 1995

- ▲ Even more Skaven!
- ▼ May have dated a little



### SKYRIM BETHESDA 2011

- ▲ Great if you hate swordfighting without people watching
- ▼ Also less feathered hats. And guns.

## VERDICT:

Amazingly true to the source material, with combat and action aplenty, and lots of rewards (loot!) for repeat play. Vermintide is the rat's whiskers.

**9**

# Sword Coast Legends

How I learned to stop caring and love the auto attack

DEVELOPER N-SPACE, DIGITAL EXTREMES  
PUBLISHER DIGITAL EXTREMES  
PRICE \$39.99 USD  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
Swordcoast.com

The whole purpose of Sword Coast Legends is to hearken back to classic RPGs of the past. It's billed as something of a spiritual successor to Baldur's Gate, Icewind Dale, earlier gold box games and even more modern but still respected fare like Neverwinter Nights and its sequel. In the single player campaign it puts the emphasis heavily on party dynamics and an epic quest line that could decide the fate of the world. It also features a GM mode that allows players to asynchronously play a campaign created by a dungeon master. It's all very ambitious and definitely very tempting on paper, but unfortunately in practise all Sword Coast Legends succeeds at doing is reminding players that the games that served as inspiration are far better than what you're playing.

Although supposedly based around the relatively new 5th edition D&D rules set, only five races and six character classes are available from the outset. This may sound like plenty, but given the fact that the basic player's handbook has nine races and 12 classes it feels like content is missing, a problem exacerbated by the fact that one of the first characters you meet if of a race you don't have access to and there are numerous characters down the road with character classes not available to players. There are plans to release new classes and races as DLC, but that gives the impression that the developers are just playing catch up on things that should have been available from release.

The story starts with a cliché, a dream sequence, and while it gets stronger from there and features what can only be described as the most violent overreaction to rumour we've ever seen, never really gets up



like a combination of the worst parts of Diablo mixed with the cooldowns of an MMO

## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You know the greatest attack is automatic

+ You know GMing is really just about adding monsters

+ You love meeting new people and stealing their loot

enough impetus to keep it entertaining throughout. Your character, no matter what class you pick is working as a caravan escort for the Order of the Burning Dawn, a rather ominously named mercenary company. Aside from the fact that a level one thief or mage isn't exactly bodyguard material it's up to your character and a few AI companions to make sure the caravan is safe. It, of course, isn't. Mercenaries disguised as bandits attack the members of the Order. Someone really dislikes the guild and wants them dead. It's a decent but not Earth-shattering premise, and about as strong as the story ever gets.

Although the game is full of conversations, none of them really

seem to matter too much outside of specific quests. If there's a key bit of information there will most probably be a stat based conversation gambit, allowing strong characters to intimidate for the info, wide characters to intuit, charismatic characters charm and the like. It's a fairly lacklustre system that feels less like roleplaying and more like an excuse to min-max your character to get the best effect out of statistics. That said, as slight as the conversational roleplaying is it's still way more entertaining than the combat, and unfortunately you seem to have to do that far more often,

Although based on Dungeons & Dragons, a roleplaying system that has inspired a number of excellent combat

## SEQUENCE

### HOW QUESTS WORK







## AUTO ATTACK

1. You only directly control one character at a time. The rest are controlled by the AI unless you pause and issue specific commands

2. The mini map isn't hugely useful aside from showing the location of enemies

3. The quest log is basic but functional

4. Flanking is important in combat due to backstabs and flanking attacks

5. A large yet still uninteresting enemy

6. Autoattack until your skills are available again

systems from straight up interpretations of the basic rules as seen in the old Gold Box games to the tactical real time pause system of Neverwinter Nights, the developers of Sword Coast Legends seem to have looked anywhere but D&D for inspiration. The resultant combat system feels more like a combination of the worst parts of Diablo mixed with the cooldowns of an MMO. Each character class has access to as number of skill trees that reflect different aspects of the class. The Paladin, for example has trees dedicated to shield defence, holy might, healing and resurrection and the like. Putting skill points earned from gaining levels or using certain unique items unlocks new active skills, passive character boosts and upgrades

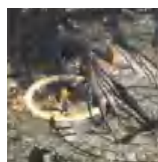
to already purchased skills. Rather than spells and spell-like abilities having finite uses (a-la D&D), each active skill instead had a cooldown. What this means in practise is that combat is a series of auto attacks while you wait for special skills to become active again.

Unless you set your game to private on the title screen (there doesn't appear to be a way to change it in game), Sword Coast legends is a public affair with other players able to jump into your game, replace one of the NPCs in the party and run around looting all the bodies and chests before you have a chance to. The public game doesn't seem to work too well, as it limits the number of NPCs you can take with you and throws off party balance, essentially making you

do without an important aspect of your group until the player logs out or you quit in frustration. The much ballyhooed GM mode turns out to be little more than a not hugely user friendly module creation tool kit with a few tools to slightly tweak the adventure once it's running. It works for making modules but any real time GMing is a laughable idea.

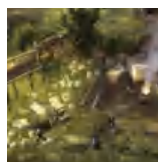
Nothing in Sword Coast Legends is intrinsically broken. Everything works but the individual parts really only do the minimum to get by. Even if the last few years hadn't been a glorious time for old-school CRPGs, with Divinity: Original Sin and the like showing how good a modern approach to old-school RPGs can be, SCL would still be little more than a rather forgettable distraction. **DANIEL WILKS PC**

## OR TRY THIS:



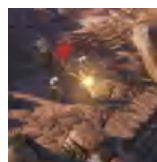
### PILLARS OF ETERNITY OBSIDIAN, 2015

- ▲ Great story and combat
- ▼ No GM mode



### WASTELAND 2 INXILE, 2014

- ▲ Amazing combat
- ▼ Story's a bit naff



### DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN LARIAN, 2014

- ▲ Amazing combat
- ▼ Balls hard

## VERDICT:

Everything in Sword Coast Legends works as intended, but that only serves to highlight that the games that inspired it are still better

5

# The Age of Decadence

The age of Mehcadence, more like

DEVELOPER IRON TOWER  
PUBLISHER IRON TOWER  
PRICE \$29.99  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
[irontowerstudio.com](http://irontowerstudio.com)

The Age of Decadence (hereafter: AoD) is an ambitious, unapologetically hardcore, text-heavy RPG set in a post-apocalyptic world loosely inspired by the decline of the Roman Empire. The game is advertised as a return to the “golden era” of isometric RPGs, combining the open-endedness of Arcanum with the heady dialogue of Planescape: Torment and the tactically rich turn-based combat of Fallout.

Which sounds incredible, right? So what went wrong? Starting with the most significant issue, the fact is that AoD’s much-vaunted open-endedness is kind of a sham. The idea is that you’re permitted a great deal of flexibility in how you construct your protagonist, with your chosen skills and traits opening up new ways of solving the various problems that crop up during the course of your adventure. But in reality you don’t so much “solve” problems in AoD as you select from a list of solutions the developer has prepared in advance.

During my first run as a grifter, I invested heavily in charisma and the Streetwise, Persuasion, and Impersonate skills, meaning I could quite literally talk my way through the entire game. What this boiled down to mechanically is selecting the highlighted “Persuasion/Streetwise” option in dialogue and watching as every situation resolved itself automatically in my favour. There was no judgement required on my part, no reason to think about what I was saying. My character was the one exercising skill, not me. I just followed his lead.

It was much the same on my second run as an assassin. Despite what you



Thrilling hands off stealth action!

for the most part, strategy boils down to having the right gear and investing in the right skills

## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You’re really into the Roman Empire

+ You prefer to read games than play them

+ You wanna be a grifter but lack charisma

might expect, allocating points to the Sneak skill doesn’t mean you ever get to do any actual sneaking – what it means is that you’re more likely to pass the Sneak stat checks that pop up from time to time. Again, you’re not the one exercising any skill, either in actually sneaking or in recognising opportunities to sneak. The game does all the hard work for you, so any sense of accomplishment you might feel is drastically diminished.

During a fight is the only time where you’re permitted to exercise genuine choice in AoD, which is unfortunate because the combat is dreadful. By design, fights are infrequent and extremely difficult, and Iron Tower makes a point of saying that this is

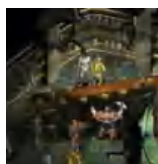
not the kind of game where you can go around killing en masse like some pseudo-Roman Terminator. Which would be fine, except the reason fights are so difficult is because you’re typically outnumbered by enemies that have better equipment and stats than you do. Thus, for the most part, strategy boils down to having the right gear and investing in the right skills. Once again, success is contingent on what your character can do, not you.

But for all its flaws, AoD is not entirely without merit. Prose is plentiful and reasonably tight, and lore nerds will find much to appreciate in the game’s voluminous fiction. It’s not a terrible deal at 30 bucks, but honestly, you can find better for cheaper. **DAN STAINES PC**

## OR TRY THIS:



**ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS AND MAGICK OBSCURA**  
TROIKA GAMES, 2001  
▲ Open-ended roleplaying aplenty  
▼ Buggy as hell



**PLANESCAPE: TORMENT**  
BLACK ISLE STUDIOS, 1999  
▲ One of the best written RPGs ever  
▼ Combat’s shithouse



**WASTELAND 2**  
INXILE ENTERTAINMENT, 2014  
▲ Skill-driven roleplaying done right  
▼ Story’s kinda meh

## VERDICT:

An ambitious game hobbled by laborious, unsatisfying combat and a “ready-made” approach to quest design that undermines player autonomy.

6



# Divinity: Original Sin Enhanced Edition

Sin again before you sequel sin

DEVELOPER LARIAN STUDIOS  
PUBLISHER LARIAN STUDIOS  
PRICE \$39.99  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
[divinityoriginalsin.com](http://divinityoriginalsin.com)

Larian Studios seems to have taken a leaf from the CDPR book with Divinity: Original Sin Enhanced Edition. They have taken an already great game - one of the very best games of last year and one of the best RPGs in recent memory in fact - and reworked it, fixing problems, tweaking the story and adding new features to create an even better experience. Like CDPR did with The Witcher and its sequel (an inevitably The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt), Larian has decided to release all the upgrades for free to people who already own the game. If you already own Original Sin, stop reading this and go play the game again. It's even better than it was before, and that's no small compliment. If you haven't yet gotten around to buying Original Sin, now's the time to make the splash. For \$39.99 USD you'll get one of the best RPG experiences in years.

The intricate character creation that rewards specialisation rather than min-maxing remains, as does the clever, involving story, but both character creation/skills, and the way the story is delivered has been tweaked. Dual wielding has been added as a weapon skill. This may seem like a small thing but it adds a whole new skill set to play with, as main hand and offhand weapons can have synergistic effects thanks to the wonderful elemental interactivity of Original Sin. Many other skills have been tweaked or changed. Two handed weapon skills, for example, not add extra crit chance to attacks, as do crossbow skills. Again these may sound like small changes but they change the way you think about combat. In terms of the story, all



Single player faux co-op  
rock, paper scissors  
decision making

It's a pretty epic cast as well - 40 voice actors recorded around 88 thousand lines of dialogue

## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You like to spend as much time creating a character as playing the game

+ You want to dual wield wands

+ You love a good RPG

dialogue is now voiced. This one change takes a game that was all but a book in terms of text and makes it a lot more approachable, and immersive.

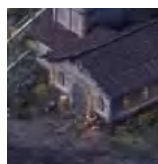
It's a pretty epic cast as well - 40 voice actors recorded around 88 thousand lines of dialogue.

Other additions include wands and grenades as new weapon types, camera control, dynamic local split-screen making it perfect for Big Picture couch play with a mate, controller support, enhanced crafting abilities and a change to difficulty. Original Sin vanilla was hard enough, but the developers have ramped things up a little more in the highest difficulties, giving the AI access to more skills, abilities, magic items,

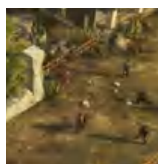
potions and scrolls. For the truly masochistic there's a new "Honor" mode that features the difficulty of the "Tactician" (hard) mode but limits the player to a single save game slot ensuring there are no do-overs.

The new gamepad controls are excellent and rival the mouse and keyboard for ease of use. Unfortunately, with all the things that Larian changed with the Enhanced Edition update there is still one feature of Original Sin that is clunky - inventory management. It's better than it was in the vanilla game, but it's still slow and clunky, but with a game as intricate as this, one clunky system in amongst so much intricacy and elegance is eminently forgivable. **TAVISH FORREST**

## OR TRY THIS:



**PILLARS OF ETERNITY**  
OBSIDIAN  
ENTERTAINMENT, 2015  
▲ Amazing old-school  
RPG  
▼ No elemental  
interactions



**WASTELAND 2**  
INXILE ENTERTAINMENT,  
2014  
▲ Amazing combat  
▼ Little environmental  
interaction



**BALDUR'S GATE:  
ENHANCED EDITION**  
OVERHAUL GAMES, 2012  
▲ A classic updated  
▼ Dated

## VERDICT:

Larian Studios has taken an already brilliant game and made it better. Original Sin Enhanced Edition is borderline perfect.

10

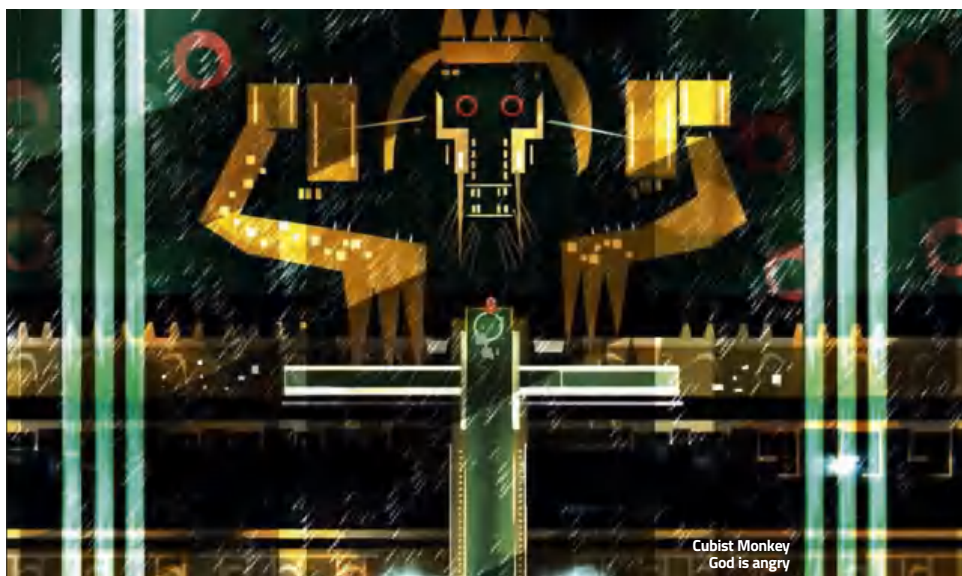
# Animal Gods

Not as fun as Animal House

DEVELOPER STILL GAMES  
PUBLISHER STILL GAMES  
PRICE \$9.99  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
[www.still-games.com](http://www.still-games.com)

For every Kickstarter success story there are more Kickstarter failures. The original pitch for Animal Gods was great - an Old England style Legend of Zelda puzzle RPG featuring a Link like character by the name of Thistle travelling the world aiming to set the ancient gods free and rid the land of the bronze industry curse that has transformed animals into horrible beasts known as husks. Initial screenshots showed images Thistle using multiple abilities to take on creatures and free the gods, and an early game map showed multiple fascinating locations with names like The Coast of Teeth, the Gleaming City and the Moors of Skye. Originally slated for release in October 2016 but available now, it appears that Animal Gods is a victim of circumstance, with the developers running out of funds and having to release a very different game a year early in the hopes that income might give them enough money to finish their dream project. As it stands, Animal Gods is not at all like the game originally promised.

It's a beautiful project with stylised flat graphics highlighted by an excellent dynamic camera that almost always shows a level to its best effect, but the gameplay definitely doesn't live up to the promise of the looks. Rather than travelling the world to dispel the curse and awaken the gods, Thistle instead must brave three temples that can be tackled in any order and release the gods that are trapped within. Each of these temples is keyed around a different item and its inherent abilities - a bow, a sword and a cloak that enables Thistle to dash short distances and renders him immune to damage whilst dashing.



As it stands, Animal Gods is not at all like the game originally promised

## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

- + You have never heard of Nintendo
- + Killing the same thing over and over appeals to your OCD
- + You've never mastered using more than one tool at a time

The sword and bow temples are almost identical in how they play, with the player having to kill ever husk in a level so they can progress to the next. Rather than being cursed creatures, husks are instead squares with eyeballs that follow set patrol paths. Each of these husks takes between one and nine hits to destroy but there is no way of knowing how many hits it will take because there is no health bar or any indicator as to remaining life. A single touch from a husk is enough to kill Thistle and send him back to the last save point, forcing him to make his way through the level again. The cloak temple is based around dashing through obstacles rather than killing husks.

Once the animal god is finally reached in a temple, rather than a boss battle, players instead have to make their way around another standard level, doing damage to the god by standing on a number of checkpoints. It's all very anticlimactic.

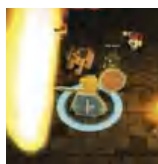
Once the three temples have been completed, a fourth temple is unlocked in which Thistle has access to all of the items. It's a small sign of what the game may have been but it comes as too little far too late. The appeal of the graphics and the repetitive but pleasant soundtrack have definitely worn off by then. You're left wondering what could have been rather than thinking about the lacklustre game you just played.

CARL SANGSTER PC

## OR TRY THIS:



**JOTUN**  
THUNDER LOTUS GAMES, 2015  
▲ Hand drawn action/exploration  
▼ Only five bosses



**FORGE QUEST**  
XOPEN REALMS LLC, 2015  
▲ Voxel Zelda  
▼ Stupid spiders



**DEX**  
DREADLOCKS LTD., 2015  
▲ Side scrolling action rpg  
▼ Poor combat

## VERDICT:

Animal Gods is little more than a disappointing glimpse of what might have been

5



# Tales from the Borderlands: Season 1

Ain't no place for no double negative

DEVELOPER TELLTALE GAMES  
PUBLISHER TELLTALE GAMES  
PRICE \$24.99  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
[www.telltalegames.com/talesfromtheborderlands](http://www.telltalegames.com/talesfromtheborderlands)

**T**ales from the Borderlands started strong, with a funny, action packed, well-paced episode that started a great story, introduced some very likeable characters and was written in a way that rewarded fans of the Borderlands franchise but was still welcoming to new players. The second episode, on the other hand was patchy at best, with some great moments but without the spark that made the first episode so good. This patchy nature went on through episodes three and four, with three feeling in many ways like it was just treading water to fill out the five episode arc and the fourth was just inconsistent. The final chapter starts as though it is going to follow suit, but after a slightly patchy beginning turns out to be probably the strongest final chapter Telltale has yet produced.

So strong is the final chapter, "The Vault of the Traveller", that it actually improves some of the lesser previous chapters, as the choices made and dialogue chosen in them finally comes to the fore, with characters and decisions from previous episodes coming to the fore in a single dramatic sequence, and depending on your actions the outcome of the game can unfold in very different ways. The high comedy of the previous chapters is readily evident throughout the final chapter, but surprisingly, there is a surprising dramatic weight to it as well, as well as a strong moral core, the latter standing out in even stronger contrast given the... moral flexibility of the protagonists, Rhys, an ambitious Hyperion exec and Fiona, a grifter.

The overarching story of the season sees Rhys, an ambitious Hyperion



■ playing the entire season as a whole highlights the many strengths it has to offer ■

## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You know where you can find a vault key

+ You have a psychopath living in your head

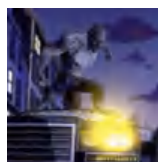
+ LOADER BOT!

executive looking to get revenge on the new CEO of Hyperion by securing a vault key and making more money than god. Through a series of shenanigans, double crosses and bad luck, Rhys falls in with Fiona, a Pandoran con woman also searching for the vault key so she can make enough money to get herself and her sister off the forsaken rock. In keeping with the FPS origins of the game, Tales from the Borderlands is probably the most action packed, and varied, of the Telltale games. Throughout the five chapters, players will take part in first person shooting, a gladiatorial chariot race, numerous chase scenes and even a Street Fighter style fight scene in which the QTE inputs are analogous

to joystick commands from the famous arcade fighter. When not throwing input commands at the player, the game is frequently laugh out loud funny, with some of the best voice work and writing seen in a Telltale game thus far.

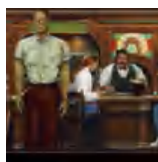
Looking back over the series after having finally completed it it appears that the greatest weakness of Tales from the Borderlands wasn't the patchiness of some of the episodes but rather the slow pace with which they were released. Playing each chapter three months apart highlights any weakness in an individual chapter, but playing the entire season as a whole highlights the many strengths it has to offer. **DANIEL WILKS** **PC**

## OR TRY THIS:



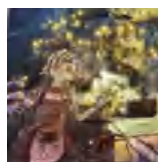
**THE WOLF AMONG US**  
TELLTALE GAMES, 2013

▲ Fables brought to life  
▼ Not a lot of laughs



**CALLAHAN'S CROSTIME SALOON**  
LEGEND ENTERTAINMENT, 1997

▲ Every pixel a pun  
▼ No moral quandaries



**BORDERLANDS 2**  
GEARBOX SOFTWARE, 2012

▲ Funny, well written shooting  
▼ No story choices

## VERDICT:

Binge all five episodes and you're in for something pretty damn special

**9**

# Minecraft: Story Mode Episode 1

Build 'em up, buttercup

DEVELOPER TELLTALE GAMES  
PUBLISHER TELLTALE GAMES  
PRICE \$24.99  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
[www.telltalegames.com/minecraftstorymode](http://www.telltalegames.com/minecraftstorymode)

The open ended building of Minecraft is ripe with individual story potential. Each player building a castle, working computer, scale model of the Enterprise or simply walking from one end of the randomly generated world to the other has a story to tell. That said, Minecraft isn't by any means a narrative game - the entire idea behind it is about freedom, so in some ways the confines of a set narrative run counter to the original aims of the developers. It's testament to the mastery of the writers and developers at Telltale Games how well they have managed to bring together their trademark narrative drive with the building of Minecraft.

Although not necessarily a kid's game, Minecraft: Story Mode is definitely pitched younger than other Telltale adventure games. The game still features danger, the long term repercussions of decisions made in the heat of the moment, timed dialogue choices, action and all the other things you expect from a Telltale game, but these decisions are much more innocent and lack the moral weight of those seen in The Walking Dead, Game of Thrones or even Tales From the Borderlands. This isn't necessarily a bad thing however, as the lightness of most decisions keeps the action flowing and keeps the story, no matter how serious it gets, rather charming and sweet.

The game begins with main character Jesse (a name that works for both the male and female avatar), the confident friend Olivia, overweight loyal thug Axel and pet pig Reuben heading off to EnderCon, a Minecraft style building competition. They



■ pays rather loving tribute to a huge number of sources and styles ■

## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

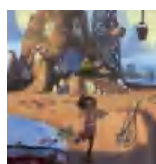
- + You want to prove you're not a loser
- + You think it's hip to be square
- + You want to play games with your kids

hope to defeat the dickish perennial favourites and stand in for every bad kids gang from 80s kids' movies and finally prove to the world and to themselves that they aren't losers. On the way to the competition the team stocks up on the supplies needed for their build, prompting a hilarious martial arts/boxing style training montage substituting a tree for a side of beef or wing chun dummy. This montage really sets the tone for the rest of the game. It wears its inspiration on its sleeve and pays rather loving tribute to a huge number of sources and styles.

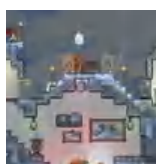
Of course things go pear shaped both at the convention and at the celebration afterwards, leading to the summoning of a Wither, a terrible

monster from beyond capable of consuming everything in existence. Naturally it's up to Jesse and her friends to save the day. There are a few moments in the two or so hours that make up the first episode, "The Order of the Stone" where death rears its ugly head, but these are so telegraphed by both the dialogue and visual cues that they are easy to avoid. This isn't a surprise given the family friendly nature of the game. What is a surprise is that the lack of any real danger had no real detrimental effect on the game. You might not find yourself in mortal danger, but by the time the credits roll you will find yourself caring for the characters and their plight. What more could you want? **DANIEL WILKS PC**

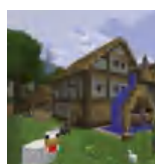
## OR TRY THIS:



**BROKEN AGE**  
DOUBLE FINE, 2014  
▲ Sweet natured coming of age  
▼ No building



**TERRARIA**  
RE-LOGIC, 2011  
▲ Semi narrative 2D building  
▼ Not as freeform as Minecraft



**MINECRAFT**  
MOJANG, 2009  
▲ Open ended building  
▼ No story mode

## VERDICT:

Minecraft: Story Mode is aimed towards a younger audience but still has enough depth to appeal to mature gamers

8



# Life Is Strange: Season 1

Life is stranger with a grandfather paradox

DEVELOPER DONTNOD ENTERTAINMENT  
PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX  
PRICE \$19.99  
AVAILABLE AT STEAM  
[www.lifeisstrange.com](http://www.lifeisstrange.com)

**L**ife is Strange is a game in the Telltale mould, with decisions or conversational gambits the player makes having an effect on later elements of the game, but French developer DONTNOD has taken this style in an even more effective, somewhat meta direction thanks to the abilities of the protagonist Max Caulfield. After five years absence, Max returns to Arcadia Bay to attend a prestigious art academy and in short order discovers four key things. One - a girl named Rachel Amber has gone missing and nobody knows if she ran away, was kidnapped or murdered. Two - Max's best friend from years past, now estranged because of how rapidly Max left Arcadia Bay five years ago, was friends with Rachel and wants to know what happened. Three - Max has apocalyptic dreams of a hurricane destroying Arcadia Bay in five days. Four - Max can rewind time.

This final discovery becomes a key focus of Life Is Strange, both thematically and mechanically, and it is the key component to making the decisions Max has to make throughout the five chapters feel so compelling. In Telltale games, players know their decisions may have an effect in the future, but in Life Is Strange, those decisions are shown both in the short term and the long term with stark clarity. Thanks to Max's ability to rewind time, she can instantly do over most decisions, seeing first-hand the immediate repercussions. Seeing all sides of a decision before making it can make the eventual choice much harder than simply having to choose, as the immediate repercussions of what you think might be a good decision could



This is a visual representation of acoustic indie rock

## Max's limited time travel and the potential apocalypse are maturely and beautifully handled

### WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You unwind by playing acoustic alt rock on your banged up guitar

+ You always want a do-over

+ Your town is going to be destroyed in five days

instantly hurt a friend or otherwise negatively affect a character you care about. Knowing the immediate outcome of a decision packs on the moral weight of any situation. It's wonderful. The time travel ability is also key to solving many of the puzzles in the game, as Max retains the information and objects she acquired during her brief time manipulations. It's one of the finest examples of an ability being tied into both the mechanics and story of a game we've seen to date.

If you're not a fan of indie acoustic rock and mumblecore stylings, Life Is Strange might not exactly be your cup of tea, as the soundtrack and general feel of the game definitely lean strongly on those two sources,

but the overall magic realist themes and the well written characters should definitely appeal to anyone who likes a good story. The manner in which the various plot threads and narrative thrusts - the disappearance of Rachel, Chloe and Max trying to rekindle their relationship. Max's limited time travel and the potential apocalypse are maturely and beautifully handled. Things get dark - very dark - but it's never just for the sake of it. There's a meaning behind everything that goes on and a level of quality that pervades every aspect of the game. Aside from the terrible mandatory stealth sections that is. Those are terrible, and rendered meaningless by time travel.

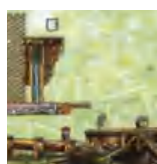
CARL SANGSTER **PC**

### OR TRY THIS:



**THE WALKING DEAD: SEASON 1**  
TELLTALE GAMES, 2012

▲ Real apocalyptic adventuring  
▼ Decisions are final



**BRAID**  
JONATHAN BLOW, 2009

▲ Time travel to solve puzzles  
▼ Total creeper



**DROPSY TENDERSHOOT**, 2015

▲ Melancholy point and click  
▼ Goddamn downs

### VERDICT:

Maybe too mumblecore for some, Life Is Strange is a wonderfully dark story of friendship and personal apocalypses

**9**

# Rebel Galaxy

Take me out, into the black

**DEVELOPER** DOUBLE DAMAGE GAMES  
**PUBLISHER** DOUBLE DAMAGE GAMES  
**PRICE** \$19.99 USD  
**AVAILABLE AT** STEAM, GOG  
[rebel-galaxy.com](http://rebel-galaxy.com)

Over the years that science fiction has portrayed space battles, the approach to framing these battles has changed wildly. The first battles were naval affairs, with heroic space sailors repelling boarders and fighting man to man and with cannons. Later came the age of the heroic starfighter, zooming around in space, pew-pew baddies with lasers and enacting dogfights in the vast emptiness of space. In the modern era, thanks in part to television shows like the revamped *Battlestar Galactica* and the criminally under watched *Space: Above and Beyond*, space combat once again began to resemble naval combat again. Those shows still had nimble fighters zooming around in space doing the pewpew, but the larger ships essentially took the role of majestic battleships, manoeuvring to fire massive broadsides and present their most well shielded parts to the enemy. This naval style of combat is what you experience in *Rebel Galaxy*, an indie space combat game currently taking Steam by storm, but shows like *Battlestar* are not the only influences that have left their mark on the game.

From the first moments of *Rebel Galaxy* to the last in the story mission, or the countless hours that can be played afterwards as you roam the galaxy trading, exploring, pirating or heroing it's obvious that the developers have watched *Firefly* more than a few times. The soundtrack of blues country is ever present, as is the idea that you are living on the rim, doing what you have to to keep alive and keep flying. This is by no means a bad thing, as the soundtrack and overall vibe adds a nice sense of familiarity, even nostalgia to proceedings. Unfortunately the



"We're gonna explode? I don't wanna explode!"

it's obvious that the developers have watched *Firefly* more than a few times

## WHY SHOULD I CARE?

+ You own a brown coat

+ You believe all guitars should twang

+ You're like a leaf on the wind

influence of *Firefly* doesn't extend to the writing, as the various characters you interact with throughout the game, from fixers through to traders, pirates and faction contacts don't display much in the way of character, sometimes to the point of making it seem as though they are all the same character wearing a different bumpy head mask.

With rare exception though, you don't play space exploration, combat and trading games for the character. You play them for the experience and the joy of flying around in the big black. On this count *Rebel Galaxy* does little to disappoint, though for those thinking the game might be something along the lines of *Elite: Dangerous* you may be in for a little bit of a surprise. Although

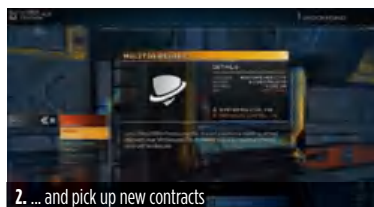
the game sports a rather lovely 3D engine and the scope of space is widely apparent, the entire game is played out on only two of the three dimensions. It feels a little strange at first, only having access to a flat plane in space, especially when the vast, sometimes garishly colourful expanse of space is rendered so lovingly. If you're anything like up your first instinct will probably be to try and gain altitude so you can come down on a target from behind, raking their delicacies with laser/rocket/mass driver/cannon fire, much like you would in many other space combat games, or in flight combat games in general, but such a thing is not possible. Instead you have to manoeuvre like a ship, angling best so your big guns can fire devastating

## SEQUENCE

### SPACE TRUCKERS



1. Dock at a station to buy new gear...

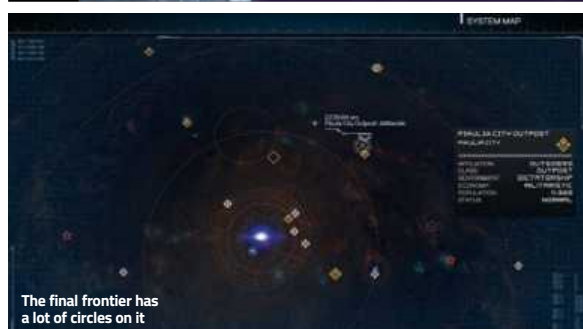


2. ... and pick up new contracts



3. That done, it's time to head out again





## FIRE!

**1.** The simple map shows the location of all friendlies and enemies in the immediate area

**2.** Broadside is your most damaging attack

**3.** The AI controls the weapons you are not in direct control of - in this case the turrets

**4.** You can switch between control of weapons. The AI instantly jumps in to pick up the slack

**5.** Thrust, acceleration and momentum are all vital for manoeuvring

**6.** Scanning an area can reveal the location of distress beacons, salvage and the like

broadside and your turrets can be brought to bear for greatest effect.

Spaceships are by no means as sluggish or bound by gravity and friction as water ships, so even though combat is played out on a flat plane, spacecraft still zip around, using a combination of thrusters and momentum to try and gain the best position. It's still essentially naval style combat, but it's a war between speedboats rather than between destroyers. The AI does a good job at aiming guns and taking a crack at the enemy, but at any time players can take control of the weapons to add that deadly human touch, enabling them to line up broadsides to more devastating effect or taking control of turrets to take out fast moving fighters. Clever use of

flak to intercept missiles, deflectors to avoid serious damage and positioning all come into play.

Rebel Galaxy features a story mode in which the main character ostensibly searches for their missing smuggler aunt, but really this serves as more of a primer to the game world than a truly great experience by itself. The story essentially guides the player through the key aspects of the game - taking missions, scouting debris fields, protecting or retrieving cargo, trading favours with factions, trading and the like, and then using the proceeds of your labours to buy new ships, upgrades, weapons and components. After the story is completed, or at any time really you can choose to leave the story behind and

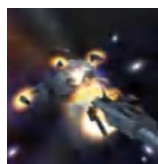
head off into the procedurally generated galaxy to seek your fortune. You can try to leave your mark peacefully by trading - though this really isn't too advisable as the market is so volatile in game that the price of a trade good can fluctuate pretty wildly in the time it takes you to travel from planet to planet - or mining. You can become a hero and patrol the space lanes for pirates, smugglers and other criminal types, or you could be one of those criminal types and prey on the innocent to make your fortune.

A lot of space is pretty barren and exploration is more geared to what happens along the way than what you find when you reach the furthest star to the right, but for \$19.99 you still get a hell of a lot of game. **DANIEL WILKS**

## OR TRY THIS:



**ELITE: DANGEROUS**  
FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS, 2015  
▲ Space with other people  
▼ Other people



**FREELANCER**  
DIGITAL ANVIL, 2003  
▲ Chris Roberts  
▼ Star Citizen still not finished



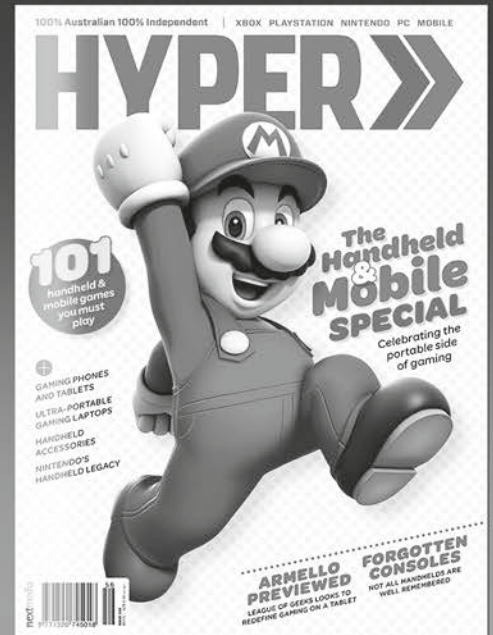
**GALAXY ON FIRE 2**  
FISHLABS ENTERTAINMENT GMBH, 2012  
▲ Farscape: the game  
▼ Shows its mobile roots

## VERDICT:

The galaxy may be a bit empty, but there's still a lot to love about Rebel Galaxy

**8**

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# The power to connect THUNDERBOLT 3

Intel delivers a truly next-gen connectivity standard

**W**hile much ado has been made about the wide availability of USB 3.0 and USB 3.1 with the launch of Intel's 6th Generation Core processor, it's not the only high-speed connection to become mainstream in 2015. The Thunderbolt interface has been around for several years now, but only now is it starting to become a common component on today's performance motherboards. Like USB it offers incredibly fast data transfer speeds, but it's even faster than the latest versions of USB, which allows it to do things that USB simply can't.

Thunderbolt 3 is the latest version of this high-speed interface, and is the version that will appear on new motherboards thanks to its blistering transfer speeds. The maximum theoretical speed of Thunderbolt 3 is an incredible 5 Gigabytes per second, or 40Gbps, whereas USB 3.1 is 10Gbps, making Thunderbolt 3 four times faster. USB 3.0 maxes out at 640 Megabytes per second, or 480Mbps, making Thunderbolt 3 almost ten times faster. This makes Thunderbolt 3 the undeniable speed leader when it comes to transferring files to and from the PC, provided it's married with a matching Thunderbolt 3 external hard drive.

However, Thunderbolt 3 is designed to do more than simply connect speedy hard drives and other peripherals to the PC; it's also designed to connect extra displays. Thunderbolt 3 encapsulates the DisplayPort 1.2 standard, and has the bandwidth to power not one, but two 4K displays using

the DP 1.2. It will also be able to drive a single 5K 60Hz display when these become more commonplace.

## WHICH PLUG DOES IT USE?

Earlier versions of Thunderbolt used a Mini-DisplayPort plug, but version 3 has settled on the new USB Type-C connector, which is the same plug used by many USB 3.0 and 3.1 connections. Unlike USB Type-A plugs, the

***"Thunderbolt 3 is designed to do more than simply connect speedy hard drives and peripherals"***

latest version doesn't have to be oriented in a certain direction to fit into the plug – there is no "right-side-up" on this plug, making it much easier to plug in. It also delivers 100W of power, which means external devices will no longer need an extra power cable to function.

Another unique feature of Thunderbolt is its ability to daisy-chain devices. This means that even though a PC may only have one Thunderbolt port, the device plugged into that port may also have its own Thunderbolt port, into which another device can be plugged. In this way up to six devices can be daisy-chained to the PC via a single Thunderbolt 3 port.

✓ Support is quickly taking off, with Apple among the first to embrace Thunderbolt 3



## THUNDERBOLT CABLES

Due to the high-speed of Thunderbolt 3, special cables are required to function at the fastest speeds. The current maximum length of a full-speed Thunderbolt 3 cable is three meters, but it must be an "active" cable to reach top speeds over this distance, and these cables now retail for around \$100. However, Intel recently announced "passive" cables using the USB Type-C connector that will be much cheaper, and will drop to a speed of 20Gbps. This is half the speed of an active cable, yet still twice the speed of USB 3.1. In the next twelve months special optical cables for Thunderbolt 3 are expected, which will increase the maximum length to a vast 60 meters yet still deliver the top speed of the standard.

One interesting use of the new Thunderbolt 3 connection is external graphics, which is sure to prove popular amongst laptop makers. When the laptop is in road-mode, it uses the integrated GPU found on today's Intel CPUs, but when the owner returns home and wants to game, the laptop can be plugged into an external graphics dock via Thunderbolt. This dock contains a dedicated desktop GPU, delivering premium game performance when the gamer needs it most.

To ensure your new motherboard has Thunderbolt 3 support, look for the inclusion of the Intel Alpine Ridge controller.





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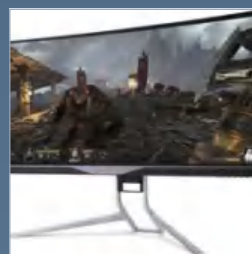
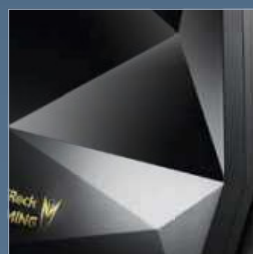
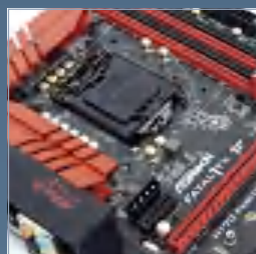
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# Tech<sup>246</sup>

## YOUR GUIDE TO PC GAMING HARDWARE



## IT ALL MAKES CENTS

Price really matters

The last few months has been a great time to be an Aussie tech reporter, and it's all thanks to our wonky Aussie dollar. Normally our pricing is in line with the US, which means our tech coverage is usually quite similar to theirs – if their reputable websites or magazines recommend a product, there's a good chance that PC PowerPlay will do the same. However, the last few months show why local coverage remains so important.

It's all due to the way our Aussie dollar has crashed. In May of this year, our dollar was worth 80 US cents, but since then it's slid all the way down to 69 US cents. This makes a \*huge\* difference to hardware retailers, who have to buy their hardware from overseas. In May of this year, they could buy a US\$500 product for AU\$625. When the dollar was at 69 US cents, the same US\$500 gizmo would set Aussie importers back \$724, which is a huge increase when profit margins are as small as they are in hardware, which can be a mere 5% to 7% over the cost of goods.

Because of this, so-called budget products being launched in Australia are arriving with price tags that are relatively higher than overseas. As a result, they're far less competitive against older products that were imported before the dollar crashed, and of which stock still exists. You can read how this has impacted products like AMD's Fury in the following pages, but the net result is that new products are arriving with what seems to be inflated pricing. So before you go into a rage and write a 14,000 word forum post about how Aussies are getting ripped off by the price of PC hardware, bear in mind that a big chunk of the recent inflationary prices is a result of our falling dollar. That's not to say that we don't get ripped off when it comes to game prices, but that's another matter entirely...

**Bennett Ring**  
Tech Editor



Our Power Award is given to products that are best in class no matter your budget.



Our Smart Buy Award goes to products that balance performance with price tag.

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RADEON HD 7970  
[www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)



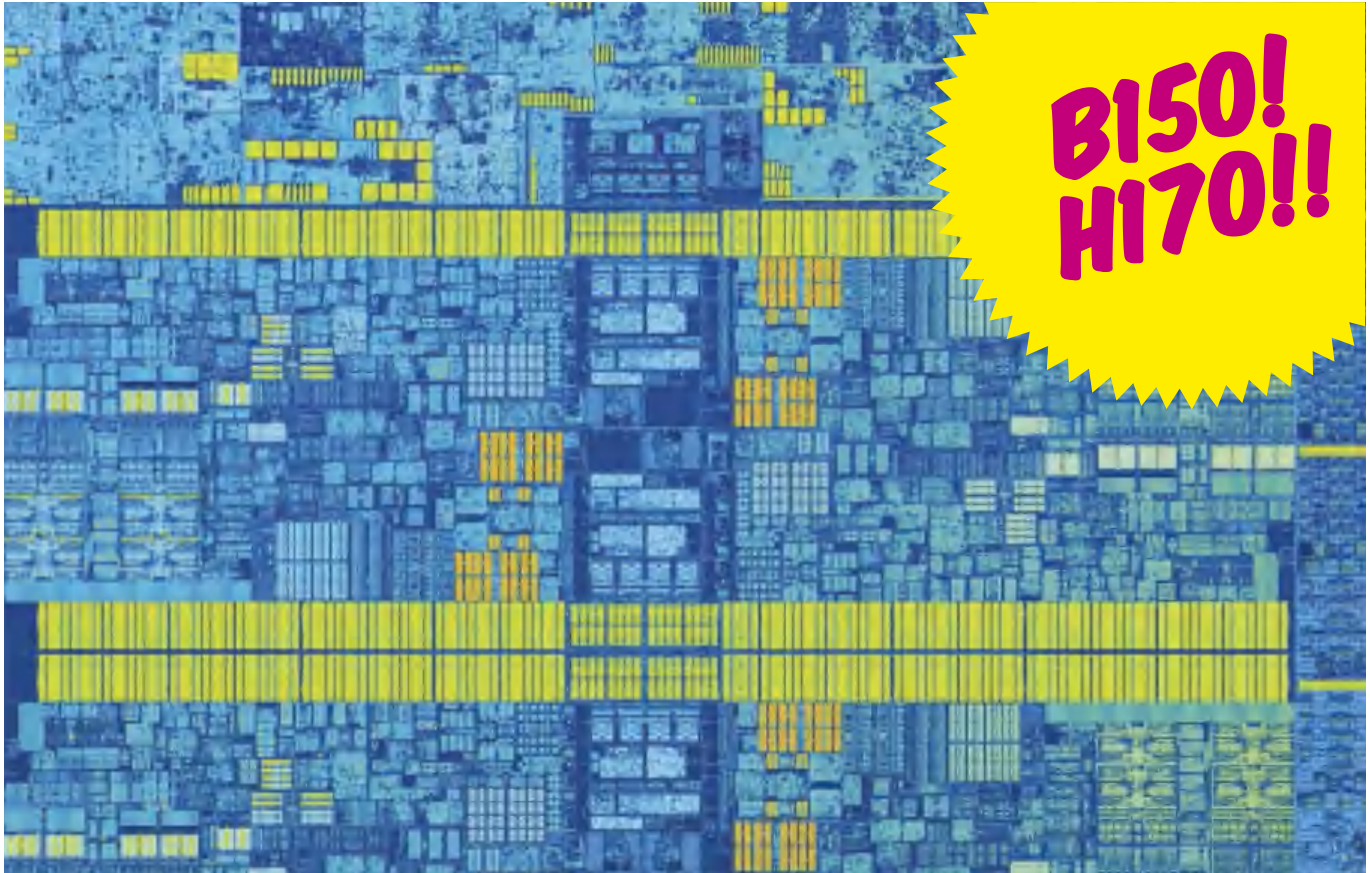
**PSU**  
CORSAIR AX860I  
[www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)



**DISPLAY**  
DELL U2711  
[www.dell.com.au](http://www.dell.com.au)







# SKYLAKE ON A BUDGET

Bennett Ring investigates 6th Gen on the cheap

Intel's 6th Generation Core CPU, also known by the much cooler codename of Skylake, is a rather pricey upgrade option. As well as forking out for a new CPU, buyers will need to buy a set of DDR4 memory modules, along with a Socket 1151 motherboard. PC PowerPlay recently checked out the most expensive Socket 1151 motherboards, those based on the high-end Z170 chipset, and were surprised at the rather high prices we encountered. It seems that the combination of a weak Aussie dollar and the feature-laden nature of these products meant

an average price point of just under \$350. Thankfully there's a cheaper way to get your Skylake on, as there are plenty of motherboards based on cheaper chipsets that'll offer many of the same benefits as the Z170.

## **B150 AND H170**

When we put the invite out to manufacturers for this roundup, we expected to be overwhelmed by products based on the H170 chipset, but that wasn't to be. H170 is meant to be used for performance and gaming boards

that aren't quite as powerful as Z170, but apparently it's a little too expensive for boards priced under the \$200 mark. As a result, our roundup is dominated by boards based on the B150 chipset. This was originally pitched as a value solution to business users, as evidenced by its support for Intel's Small Business Advantage suite of products, but it's been co-opted as the basis for cheap gaming boards. We've never seen such widespread use of a low-end solution across gaming boards before, highlighting just how expensive Skylake's

chipsets must be to buy.

When compared to the Z170, the B150 chipset cuts plenty of corners. The biggest issue for budget-builders is the lack of overclocking support, which means these boards can't be used to extract the maximum performance out of Intel's highly overclockable i5-6600K, a real shame. In the past we've seen motherboard makers sneakily enable overclocking on cheaper chipsets, but Intel wasn't too happy about the practice. This time around it seems the motherboard makers are toeing the company line, and haven't enabled overclocking on anything other than the official overclocking chipset, the Z170. Boo to that we say – fingers crossed the situation changes in the future, but it's not looking likely.

The next major change is in the number of high speed PCIe 3.0 lanes for graphics. Z170 can handle several configurations: 1 x PCIe 3.0 x16; 2 x PCIe 3.0 x8 or 1 x PCIe 3.0 x8 with 2 x PCIe 3.0 x4. This means it can run both CrossFire and SLI configurations. However, B150 only offers a single configuration for the graphics lane, in the form of a single PCIe 3.0 lane with x16 bandwidth. This is true even when the board has two PCIe slots that use

the x16 physical length – only one has x16 bandwidth, while the second is limited to x4. This means SLI is out, but CrossFire is still possible as it only requires x4 speed on the second lane (SLI needs x8 as a minimum).

#### LESS USB FOR YOU!

Z170 delivered a whopping 26 Flex-I/O ports connected to the PCH chip, which could be used for PCIe lanes, Ethernet, USB and other connectivity options. B150 trims this back by around a third, to 18 Flex-I/O ports, which is why this cheap chipset can only deliver eight PCIe 3.0 lanes, versus "up to" twenty on the Z170. The drop in Flex-I/O ports also explains why there are fewer USB options, with B150 delivering up to six USB 3.0 and twelve USB 2.0, whereas the Z170 could handle ten USB 3.0 and fourteen USB 2.0.

Six SATA 3 ports remain, but most won't include any form of RAID support to these ports. Thankfully most B150 boards have included a single high-speed M.2 port for the latest generation of SSDs, which will deliver RAID-beating speeds without all of the setup issues.

Finally, just like Z170, B150 brings DDR4 memory support to the table, but DDR3 is

still an option on some boards. Going with DDR3 sounds like a great way to decrease the cost of upgrading to Skylake, until you realise that none of the new Skylake chipsets work with regular DDR3. They need DDR3L, which operates at a low operating voltage of 1.35V, and which is basically non-existent outside of laptops. We tried to run a DDR3 B150 board with standard 1.5V memory and it failed to boot; only later did we read that doing so can actually kill the CPU. We have to thank Kingston for delivering two sticks of DDR3L memory at the last minute, allowing us to test the one DDR3 board in the roundup.

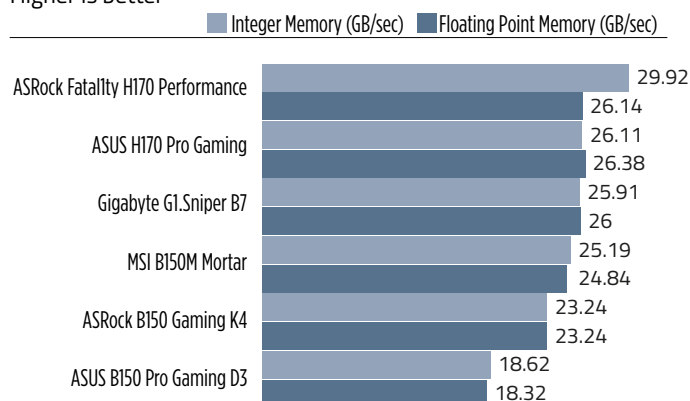
#### YOU PAY FOR WHAT YOU GET.

As you can see, B150 has suffered plenty of cuts to make it a more affordable option. We doubt Intel anticipated that it's budget business solution would become the basis for entry-level gaming boards, but that's exactly what has happened. However, with an average price of \$190, it's plain to see why – B150 boards are considerably more affordable than their Z170-based cousins. Let's read on to see if their performance has suffered as much as their feature sets.

## Motherboard Benchmarks

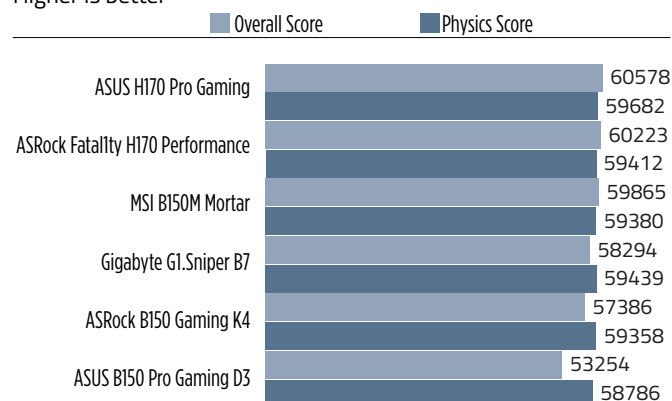
### SiSoft Sandra Memory

Higher is better



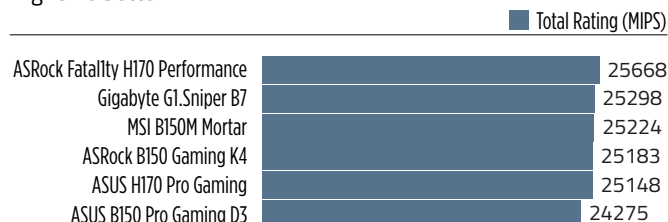
### 3DMark Ice Storm Extreme Test

Higher is better



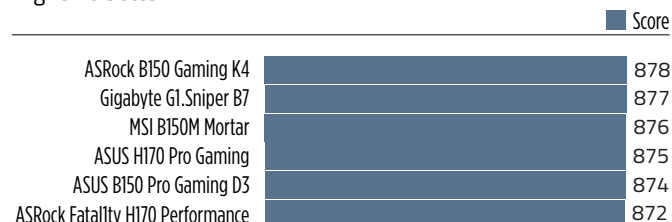
### 7zip

Higher is better



### Cinebench R15 CPU

Higher is better





# ASRock B150 Gaming K4

Cutting features to cut the price


PRICE \$175  
www.asrock.com

**B**ack when we first reviewed Skylake, we pointed out that one of its best features was the widespread adoption of M.2 ports for high-speed storage. Sadly ASRock seems to have decided that this isn't such a big deal, and has left it off this board entirely, making it one of the only boards in the roundup to do so.

Instead ASRock appears to have tried to make this board look and feel like a full-priced gaming board. Unlike many of the competitors here, it's a full-sized ATX board, and comes with plenty of expansion slots. Twin full-length PCIe 3.0 x16 along with three PCIe x1 slots deliver room for a CrossFire setup, but the fact that the second x16 lane is limited to x4 speeds means SLI is still a no-go. Interestingly ASRock has

included a power plug next to the top PCIe slot, and the board comes with ten-phase power, but we're not sure why, as it can't overclock the CPU.

Killer's budget LAN controller is present, a fact that is offset by the excellent Purity Sound 3 audio solution, which is one of the better sound solutions in the roundup. Unfortunately the performance metrics for this board aren't exactly glowing, with it tailing the pack in every benchmark.

It might be one of the cheapest motherboards in the roundup, but the lack of M.2 or SATAe makes this board hard to recommend. Combined with lackluster performance, and the twenty bucks you'll save when buying this board isn't reason enough to consider it. **BENNETT RING** 



- Full ATX size
- Three PCIe slots
- Excellent onboard audio

- No M.2 or SATAe
- Killer LAN
- Lackluster performance

## VERDICT:

Forgoing one of the key reasons to consider Skylake, the lack of high-speed storage and low performance makes this board hard to recommend.

6

# ASRock Fatal1ty H170 Performance

H170 in the hizzouse


PRICE \$199  
www.asrock.com

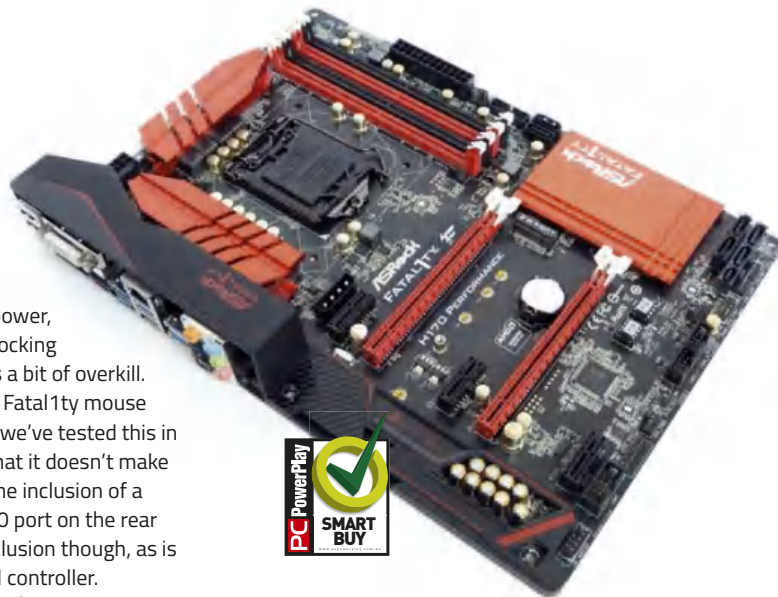
**W**hile most boards in this roundup utilise the exceptionally cheap B150 chipset, it's nice to see that a couple managed to squeeze the better H170 chipset in. This board is one of them, so we were keen to see if it had to cut back on other features to offset the more expensive chipset.

Unlike the other ASRock board, a single M.2 port is included for your speedy SSDs. There are also twin SATAe connections if anybody ever releases a hard drive that uses this connection – we've yet to see one cross our testbench. The six SATA 3 ports can be run in RAID modes 0, 1, 5 and 10, making this board stand out when it comes to high speed storage.

Heading to the PCIe slots, it's identical to the other ASRock board, with two x16

and three x1 slots. Once again ASRock has used ten phase power, but the lack of overclocking options means this is a bit of overkill. ASRock's proprietary Fatal1ty mouse port is also included; we've tested this in the past and found that it doesn't make a lick of difference. The inclusion of a single Type-C USB 3.0 port on the rear is a very welcome inclusion though, as is the use of Intel's LAN controller.

Considering it's just \$24 more expensive than the other ASRock board, there's simply no competition – this is by far the superior of the two. In fact, it's one of the best value boards on the market today, with the ASUS H170 Pro Gaming board its only rival. **BENNETT RING** 



- M.2 and SATAe
- Type-C USB
- Excellent onboard audio

- No overclocking

## VERDICT:

This board proves that H170 is possible for less than \$200, without cutting every other corner. Highly recommended.

9

# ASUS B150 Pro Gaming D3

DDR3 doesn't quite keep up

PRICE \$195  
www.asus.com.au

ASUS was the only company that dared to send a DDR3 powered board into our roundup, so we have to give them props for doing so. Unfortunately, our CPU and memory intensive benchmarks show just how much slower this is than DDR4, but real world applications probably wouldn't lag so far behind. As such, this could be a cheaper option for those who already own DDR3L memory, provided it ran at the 1.35V Skylake requires.

ASUS has gone for a mix of old and new with the peripheral slots, with twin x16 slots, another two x1 and two legacy PCI slots. As with every other board in the roundup, the second x16 slot only delivers x4 bandwidth, limiting this board's multi-GPU functionality to CrossFire. A single M.2 slot delivers high-speed storage, while six SATA 3 ports are

ready for your other drives. There's no mention of RAID support though, a result of the B150 chipset used within.

We appreciate the use of Intel's new I219V LAN controller, while the SupremeFX sound solution is one of the best in this price range. It may use the ubiquitous Realtek ALC1150 codec, but the use of high quality capacitors and amplifiers delivers a class-leading SnR of 115dB. That's seriously impressive for onboard audio at this price range.

Despite the board's decent feature set, we're going to shy away from recommending it due to the slower DDR3L memory that it requires. Considering your existing DDR3 probably won't work here, meaning you might as well upgrade to DDR4 anyway, there are better, faster, options around.

BENNETT RING PC



- Type-C USB 3.1
- Intel LAN controller
- Excellent onboard audio
- Requires low voltage DDR3L memory
- Slower performance

## VERDICT:

The use of legacy DDR3L memory makes this a slower performer than its DDR4-powered competitors.

6

# ASUS H170 Pro Gaming

H170 is hard to ignore

PRICE \$219  
www.asus.com.au

The second of only two boards in the roundup to use the better H170 chipset, this potent performer from ASUS might stretch the budget a little, but delivers a whole lot more. Read on to see why this is one of our favourite budget gaming boards around.

Being based on the H170 chipset gives this board a couple of key advantages. For starters, the six SATA 3 ports are capable of RAID 0, 1, 5 and 10. Two of these can be used for a single SATAe connection, which complements the M.2 port for those requiring the ultimate in storage speed. It's got the most generous range of PCIe slots in the roundup, with twin x16 slots alongside four x1. Performance is excellent, coming in second in two of our tests.

We figured ASUS would go for Killer's cheap LAN solution to offset the cost of the H170 chipset, so we were pleasantly surprised to see the real deal, Intel's I219V, used instead. An ASMedia controller delivers twin USB 3.1 ports, one of which uses the excellent Type-C connection, a feature that few boards in this price range includes. The SupremeFX audio solution is arguably the best in the roundup, with its 115dB SnR ratio proving just how crisp and clear it is.

It might cost just a little more than the rest, but for the price of two Big Mac meal deals, there's really no reason for price to be a concern. If you're looking for the best budget board on the market, look no further. BENNETT RING PC



- Plenty of PCIe slots
- M.2 and SATAe
- Excellent audio

- Slightly more expensive

## VERDICT:

The slightly higher price is easily justified by the excellent performance and rich feature-set. Our favourite budget board at this price range.

10



# Gigabyte G1.Sniper B7

A B150 board in disguise

PRICE \$210  
www.gigabyte.com.au

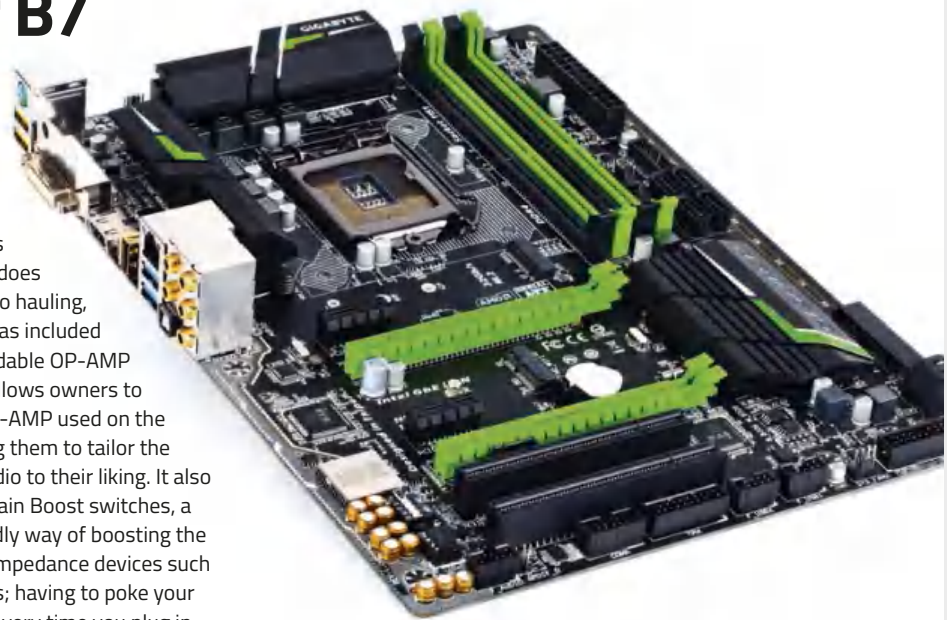
Priced at just ten bucks less than the kick-arse ASUS H170 Pro Gaming, we fully expected Gigabyte's board to include the more expensive H170 chipset. To our surprise, nay, disappointment, it turns out that this is actually another B150 board, albeit with a higher than expected price tag.

For the money you get a full-sized ATX board that has six extension slots: two x16 PCIe, another two x1 PCIe, and two legacy PCI. Both M.2 and SATAe drives are accounted for, with a single slot of each, while six SATA 3 ports are standard. Sadly there's no RAID option though. Intel's new I219V LAN controller has been paired with cFosSpeed software, which is a QoS traffic-shaping package. We didn't test this extensively, but the good news is that it can be switched off if there are any issues.

Perhaps the most notable feature on this board is the sound solution. Once

again Realtek's ALC1150 chip does the heavy audio hauling, but Gigabyte has included its user-upgradable OP-AMP system. This allows owners to replace the OP-AMP used on the board, allowing them to tailor the tone of the audio to their liking. It also has onboard Gain Boost switches, a rather unfriendly way of boosting the gain for high-impedance devices such as headphones; having to poke your motherboard every time you plug in your professional headphones is sure to get annoying.

While we dig the audio solution, at the end of the day this is another B150 product. As such it has fewer USB 3.0 and 2.0 ports and slower performance than competing H170 boards, making it hard to recommend. **BENNETT RING PC**



- OP-AMP audio solution
- Intel LAN
- Healthy range of PCIe/PCI slots
- B150 chipset
- High price

## VERDICT:

It's priced at H170 levels, but doesn't have the features to match.

7

# MSI B150M Mortar

Small but still feature packed

PRICE \$149  
www.msi.com

Welcome to the cheapest board in our roundup, MSI's Micro-ATX Mortar. The reduced size has obviously helped MSI keep costs down, yet it still packs many of the features of much more expensive options. Let's see what MSI has managed to cram into such a small board.

Twin PCIe x16 lanes sit alongside two PCIe x1 slots, allowing this miniature motherboard to handle a CrossFire solution if you feel the need for speed. Four DDR4 slots accept up to 64GB of memory, but they're limited to 2133MHz speeds due to the motherboard's lack of overclocking support. A single M.2 port is waiting for your high speed storage, while two of the six SATA 3 ports can be co-opted to handle SATAe duties. Four USB 3.1 ports and two USB 2.0 ports face the rear of the I/O plate, with room for two more of each via internal headers.

Perhaps the only disappointing facet of this board is the archaic audio chipset, using Realtek's aging ALC892 chip. This has been around for over five years, and onboard audio has come a long way since then. We'd highly recommend either using the HDMI out for bitstreaming, or buying a discrete sound card.

As our benchmarks show, this board sits around the middle of the pack when it comes to performance. With a decent feature-set to boot, the low price of this product makes it especially noteworthy for those who want to build the cheapest possible Skylake system. **BENNETT RING PC**



- Super cheap
- M.2 and SATAe
- CrossFire ready
- Old audio chip

## VERDICT:

MSI has packed plenty of features into this affordable Micro-ATX motherboard, making it excellent value for money.

9



## GPU

# AMD Radeon R9 Nano

When size matters.

PRICE \$1200  
www.amd.com

Until now, Home Theatre PC owners have either had to settle for mid-range performance in a small case, or deal with an overheating performance GPU in a bulbous HTPC case. The Nano changes all that. It's the smallest graphics card to ever offer enthusiast performance, finally allowing for small form factor builds to truly deliver high-end gaming performance.

The Nano is a happy side-effect of the HBM memory used in AMD's new R9 Fury family. Unlike a traditional graphics card, which requires up to a dozen postage-stamp sized memory modules to be placed on the PCB, HBM shrinks the memory to tiny stacks that are just a few millimetres across. These are then placed around the edge of the

GPU, on a plate called a transposer that is just a few millimetres wider than the GPU itself. As a result the graphics card can be shrunk – in fact, we reckon AMD could probably go even smaller than the Nano.

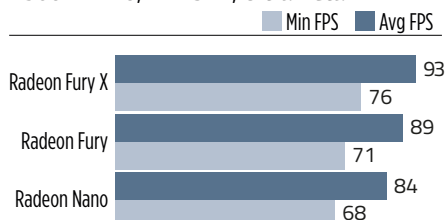
So just how small is the Nano? Damn small. It's just six inches in length, or 18cm for those who prefer less phallic measuring scales. This is only slightly longer than the PCI Express slot that it fits into, though it does have a double slot design, meaning it'll take out two expansion slots on the back of your case – just like basically every other graphics card on the market. The small size makes it suitable for even the most cramped PC interior, and we're sure it's going to prove a hit with case modders looking for the

smallest possible graphics card.

Unlike the R9 Fury, also reviewed this issue, the Nano hasn't trimmed back any of the Fury X features. It's packing the full 4096 Stream Processors, 256 Texture Units and 64 ROPs of the Fury X, along with the stupidly wide 4096-bit memory bus. Yep, it manages to do all this without the custom water cooler of the Fury X. Obviously a compromise had to be made to deal with all that heat, and in the Nano's case it's a teeny tiny frequency drop, down 50MHz to a boost clock of 1000MHz according to the AMD literature. Well, that's what AMD claims; when we get to the performance we'll reveal the true story. Rather than go for anything fancy, AMD has used a single fan design, which pushes air out the rear

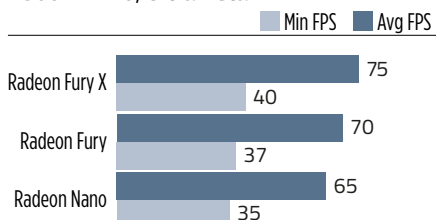
## GRID AUTOSPORT Benchmarks

2560 x 1440, 4xMSAA, Ultra Detail



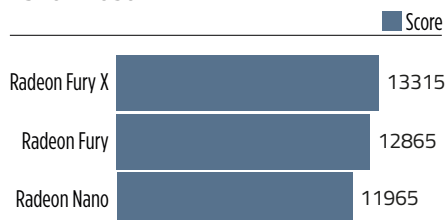
## SHADOW OF MORDOR Benchmarks

2560 x 1440, Ultra Detail



## 3DMARK Firestrike

1920 x 1080








of the card, as well as into the case. It's relatively quiet, hitting just 46dB on our soundmeter under load, which is fine for HTPC purposes.

While the new HBM memory is pretty damn impressive both from a performance and size perspective, it's got one major issue at the moment. Version 1 of the technology is limited to a maximum of just 4GB, which is not a lot when we're talking 4K resolutions and ultra-high texture details. To test the impact this had we ran Grand Theft Auto V in two modes. The first had a memory footprint of almost 6GB, while the second dropped this to 4GB but put the GPU under the exact same load from a processing perspective. In the 6GB mode, when the Nano ran out of memory and had to fetch new data over the sluggish PCIe bus from the system RAM, the minimum frame rate dropped to a lowly 2.4 frames per second. Mode two saw the card maintain a minimum framerate of around 15 fps, the same speed as the likes of the GTX 980 Ti. It clearly illustrates that if a game requires more than 4GB of video memory, the Nano simply isn't up to the task. It's for this reason that NVIDIA has held off on HBM until late 2016, when HBM v2

arrives with its support for a maximum of 32GB of memory. Thankfully using more than 4GB of memory is still a rare occurrence, with only a handful of games able to do so, but it's worth thinking about when you're spending this much dosh on a graphics card.

When it came time to test the card, we were quite surprised by the first round of benchmark results. According to the specs on paper, this thing should handily beat the Fury, and almost keep up with the Fury X, but our Nano was trailing the Fury by around 7%. After running the tests several times and reinstalling the drivers, our results remained the same. A spot of online investigation prompted us to run GPU-Z whilst the benchmarks were doing their thing, and we immediately spotted the issue. Despite the card aiming for a Boost Frequency of 1000MHz, the car actually runs between 850MHz and 900MHz during testing. This is because it has a much lower thermal threshold than its big brother, with a TDP of just 175W. Without a fancy water cooler to remove heat, the solution is to dial back the GPU speed. The result is a card that is around 12-15% slower than the Fury X, despite having nearly identical specs.

■ Despite this speed drop, the Nano remains the fastest ultra-compact graphics card by a long shot ■

Despite this speed drop, the Nano remains the fastest ultra-compact graphics card by a long shot. The next closest card is the GeForce GTX 970 or R9 380, but they're at least 30% slower in most circumstances. They're also around half the price though – the Nano is *incredibly* expensive, coming close to GeForce Titan pricing. If you're looking for value for money, look elsewhere. However, if you want the fastest possible performance in an ultra-small form factor, there is nothing else like the Nano. BENNETT RING 

- Ultra small
- Full-sized performance
- Quiet cooler

- Very expensive
- No HDMI 2.0
- Only 4GB memory

#### VERDICT:

If price is no obstacle and size is everything, the Nano lives in a class unto itself, with no competitors.

8



## VIDEOCARD

# Sapphire R9 Fury

Fast and a little bit Furious

PRICE \$999

[www.sapphiretech.com](http://www.sapphiretech.com)

Hell hath no fury like an AMD engineer scorned, but that's exactly what happened when NVIDIA released its spoilerific GTX 980 Ti product. AMD thought it had the performance market stitched up with its HBM-powered Fury X, but then along came the GTX 980 Ti, priced identically but with a noticeable performance lead. We truly feel for the folk behind the Fury X, but today sees their second chance arrive. The Fury is a cut-back version of the Fury X, though it's not quite as affordable as it might once have been due to the weak Aussie dollar.

Here's where the problem lies. Stock of the original Fury X was imported into Australia before the Aussie dollar decided to go for a freefall. That's why you can now pick up a Sapphire Fury X for just \$1099. However, the Fury has been imported on a much weaker dollar, which is why it's now retailing for just \$99 less than the full-blown version,

at \$999. It's a totally different story overseas. Take the US for example; a Radeon R9 Fury X will set you back around US\$670, while the Fury is a much more affordable \$550. In pure percentages, Yanks save 18% when buying a Fury compared to the Fury X, while Aussies save just 9%. And that makes Fury a much harder sell here in Australia. It's no fault of AMD, or Sapphire, or your local IT store; it's simply the result of us having to buy stock on our crappy Aussie dollar.

So then, what's the difference between the Fury and the Fury X? The major change is a drop in the total number of Stream processors, from 4096 to 3584, while texture units drop from 256 to 224. Thankfully the number of ROPs is identical, at 64, but the GPU frequency is slightly slower at 1000MHz, a 50MHz dip compared to Fury X. It's still got the incredibly fast 4GB of High

Bandwidth Memory though, and it's also lacking HDMI 2.0, like its big brother.

Our performance benchmarks show that the Fury does a fine job of keeping up with its sibling, trailing by just 6% or so. However, given the fact that you can pick up a Fury X for just \$99 more, we'd suggest spending that little extra to get the better product. Sadly for AMD, NVIDIA's GeForce GTX 980 Ti makes a mockery of the Fury's price, yet is a heck of a lot quicker. As such, there's simply no way to recommend the Fury over NVIDIA's spoiler product. **BENNETT RING PC**

- Keeps up with Fury X
- Quiet cooling
- Cool HBM memory tech
- Much slower than a 980 Ti

## VERDICT:

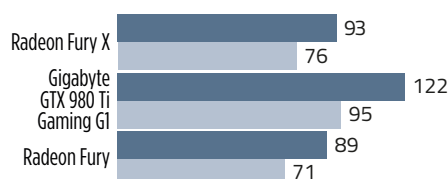
Considering it's the same price as the superior GTX 980 Ti, there's simply no reason to consider buying the Fury.

7

## GRID AUTOSPORT Benchmarks

2560 x 1440, 4xMSAA, Ultra Detail

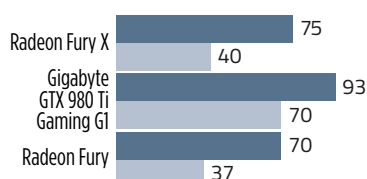
■ Min FPS ■ Avg FPS



## SHADOW OF MORDOR Benchmarks

2560 x 1440, Ultra Detail

■ Min FPS ■ Avg FPS



## 3DMARK Firestrike

1920 x 1080

■ Score







## REMOTE

# Logitech Harmony Elite Universal Remote

Decrypting the input mess

PRICE \$549  
www.logitech.com

As the resident geek in your home, you probably face the challenge that many geeks face – you're the only one in the house who knows how to get the plethora of devices in your AV cabinet all set to the right mode to operate. In my place, watching streaming media over the PS4 requires far too many steps for my better half to remember, which is why I'm guaranteed a phone call every night I'm away on business trips. Universal remotes promise to solve this problem, but until now everyone I've tested has one nagging issue that stops something or other from being fully automated. I'm happy to report that the Harmony Elite is the first kit I've used where everything just worked... yet the rapid march of technology has made a big part of this kit obsolete already.

In the box you'll find the touchscreen remote, charging base, Bluetooth-powered receiver hub and, best of all, two miniature IR-blasters on lengthy cables. The hub can blast out IR signals, but given that you're probably going to sit it on top of the AV cabinet, and that all of your devices are underneath it, the

two IR-blasters will prove invaluable. I hung one over my Pioneer amp's IR receiver, while the second wasn't needed, as the hub controlled my TV.

Set up is all handled via the mobile phone application, and it's unquestionably the smoothest universal remote configuration I've ever seen. Logitech has been refining this software for over a decade, which explains why it detected my 6 year old amp without any issues. After just 15 minutes I had the remote configured to do one of two things – Watch Digital TV, or power up the PS4 for Netflix and media streaming. Normally that would require powering on each device, then selecting the right input for each, as well as a couple of weird settings, but now it's all done with just a single button press. The hub's Bluetooth and Wi-Fi connectivity means it can control the PS4, as well as various home automation gear when and if I get around to installing Wi-Fi lightbulbs.

There's just one issue with this kit – the remote control itself. It's a beauty, that's for sure, but the smartphone application is just as good, if not better.

■ I'm happy to report that the Harmony Elite is the first kit I've used where everything just worked ■

Available on both iOS and Android, I can't see myself ever using the remote control instead of my Galaxy S6 phone. Logitech would do well to simply sell the hub and IR blasters, which would help to reduce the rather high price point.

Still, \$549 is about right for a universal remote of this level of sophistication, and the fact that it includes the mini-IR blasters is an added bonus. Best of all, it finally freakin' works, the first time I've tested a universal remote in over a decade without any issues. **BENNETT RING PC**

- Mini-IR blasters are brilliant
- Bluetooth and Wi-Fi controlled Hub
- Works perfectly
- Still rather expensive
- Remote hand unit is obsolete

## VERDICT:

Logitech has finally included everything you need in the box, as well as something you don't, the remote itself.

9



## NETWORKING

## ASRock G10 Gaming Router

A bag of tricks

PRICE \$399

[www.asrock.com.tw](http://www.asrock.com.tw)

**B**etter known for their huge range of motherboards, ASRock is now dipping its toes into the Wi-Fi market with the release of the G10 gaming router. It definitely makes a strong first impression thanks to its striking design, but it's the extras that ASRock has included that make this worthy of note. Unfortunately, not all of them can be considered useful.

Before we look at the odd inclusions, let's check out its Wi-Fi capabilities. It's using Qualcomm's new IPQ8064 dual-core networking chip, along with a hefty 256MB of flash and 512MB of DRAM memory. The latest 802.11ac standard is supported, with a whopping eight antennae. ASRock claims the 802.11n 2.4GHz band is capable of 800Mbps, while the 5GHz 802.11ac hits a record-breaking 1733Mbps. Obviously these are theoretical though; past experience with Wi-Fi testing shows we're lucky to hit even half the claimed speeds.

We used the excellent LAN Speed Test to check out the speed of this router on both the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands. We should point out that these results are very specific to our location, which has around a dozen nearby Wi-Fi networks. All Wi-Fi settings were left at automatic, so the router


filled the channel with the least interference. At a range of approximately 10 metres, the 2.4GHz band delivered a sustained throughput of 197Mbps, which is on par with other 802.11ac routers we've tested. The 5GHz band doubled this to 406Mbps, a long way off the 1733Mbps that ASRock claims, yet close to the top speed we've seen in this environment. A big reason for this is that our test laptop is only equipped with a 2x2 receiver, whereas this thing uses a 4x4 transmitter; as 4x4 receivers become more popular, speeds should increase. It should also deliver better performance to multiple devices simultaneously.

Where this differs from other AC routers is the inclusion of two rather unique features, the first of which is an 802.11n dongle that doubles as a HDMI Miracast/EZPlay device. Plug it into your TV and you can cast directly to it. Plug it into an Ethernet cable while travelling and you've got an instant 802.11n Wi-Fi Access Point. Strangely the dongle can't be used to connect a device to the router via Wi-Fi, which seems to be a greatly missed opportunity, and would have made it much more useful.

The other feature is, well, weird. An Infra-Red transmitter on this device

allows you to control your TV, amplifier and other home devices via the ASRock Router APP on your Smartphone.

There are two issues with this though; for starters, most users won't have their router within line of sight of their home AV gear, so the IR transmitter is pointless. Secondly, the interface for controlling this function is a long way off the superb universal remotes created by Logitech and others who specialise in IR control.

ASRock is charging a very high premium for this router, but you get a lot for the dosh. The 4x4 transmitter should deliver better speeds as more devices adopt this standard, while the dongle is a great idea, albeit lacking the ability to work as an Ethernet to Wi-Fi adaptor. And we're sure somewhere, somebody out there will probably even find use for the IR blaster. **BENNETT RING** 

- Top-echelon performance
- Wi-Fi dongle
- Solid interface design

- Lacks extremely advanced Wi-Fi settings
- IR-blaster is a gimmick

### VERDICT:

It might cost a heck of a lot, but the superfast speeds that it will deliver in future, as well as the clever Wi-Fi dongle, make it worth the admission fee.

8





## HEADSET

# Audio Technica ATH-AG1X ISOLATION and ATH-ADG1X OPEN AIR

Our favourite headphones get an upgrade

PRICE \$349

[www.audio-technica.com](http://www.audio-technica.com)

We've been long-time admirers of Audio Technica, a Japanese company that specialises in high-end headphones. Gamers have long been using their music headphones for gaming, a trend the company capitalised on a couple of years ago when after releasing its first gaming models. This month sees the follow-up products, in the form of the ATH-AG1X and ATH-ADG1X. With prices that firmly put these in the enthusiast category, can they deliver the additional sound quality such a premium price commands?

These two sets of headphones are basically identical with one exception – the AG1X uses an isolation design. This means the padding around the ear is of a leather-like material, and blocks audio from escaping. This is great if you happen to do a bit of bed-side gaming and don't want to annoy your other half, but it comes with a trade-off. The isolation effect means the audio bounces around inside the ear piece, leading to a narrower sound stage that isn't quite as crystal clear as the open air design. When testing these two, we definitely preferred the wider sound of the ADG1X headphones.

Other than this, they're the same. Audio Technica's weird yet effective head-paddle things help

the headphones stay in place while distributing the weight nicely, and the new models seemed much more stable than the first gaming headsets. A new feature that had us slightly confused at first is the in-line volume controller; we didn't notice this, and couldn't figure out why neither headphone was working. A quick call to the supplier and a sheepish grin later, and we had both sets cranking.

They both use an identical 53mm driver, and it's an absolute ripper. We tested both sets while plugged into Creative's excellent E5 headphone amplifier, and didn't need to boost the impedance to get them rocking. After testing Corsair's \$200 VOID headset last issue, the massive leap in sound quality was a pleasant surprise. Both headsets deliver a much more balanced, even sound – there's none of the overriding bass seen in most gaming headsets. No matter how busy the soundscape, every effect was imbued with detail, whether it was the smoker's voice in AC-DC's Thunderstruck, the reload mechanism of the P-90 in Battlefield 4, or the satisfying whump of an implosion grenade in the Battlefront Beta.

Voice quality over both was exceptional, as to be expected considering Audio Technica have been making pro mics for over fifty years. So

far, so good, but there's just one problem with both of these headsets, and it's the new Logitech G633 headset. These \$279 headphones deliver sound almost as beautifully as the Audio Technicas, but for a much more reasonable price point... provided you plug them into something like the E5 headphone amp, which will set you back another \$270 or so. The G633 headset also includes its own audio decoder that handles both virtual Dolby 7.1 and DTS Headphone X surround sound, but when powered by this the sound quality doesn't come close to the Audio Technicas with a decent amp.

Having said that, the Audio Technicas do have the superior sound quality even with a third party headphone amp in the mix. The ATH-ADG1X OPEN AIR are now our reference gaming headphones, but if we had to pay for these versus the Logitech's, we'd probably go for the cheaper option. **BENNETT RING**

- Incredible sound quality, rich with detail
- Excellent microphone

- Expensive
- Requires sound card

## VERDICT:

Audio Technica has delivered a very capable set of headphones, but Logitech's competing headset offers better value.

8



## MONITOR

# Acer Predator XR341CK

Curves in all the right places

PRICE \$1499

[www.acer.com.au](http://www.acer.com.au)

Anyone who tells you that 2015 isn't the Year of the Monitor needs rocks removed from their head. We have 4K, ultrawide, curved, all the syncs and refresh rates punching well above 100Hz. We know you're probably thinking about an upgrade, but to jump in now, or wait as the revolution takes us even further into gaming perfection?

The Acer Predator XR341CK is the best of the lot, right now, ticking more boxes than anything else. It's not cheap, but look at what you get... at 34 inches, with a resolution of 3440x1440 in an ultrawide 21:9 aspect ratio, it offers an enormous amount of visual real estate. The vertical res of 1440 is especially important; we've seen several 21:9 screens over this year with a paltry 1080 vertical res, and that just isn't enough – whether for games, or more critically; Windows desktop use.

The ultrawide format is not all good. Some genres win, others suffer. Driving games are especially fantastic as your FOV shifts only in the horizontal, and it's not hard to trick the brain into thinking it's looking out through a helmet slit. Strategy games also take good advantage of the wide format,

displaying more of the area, shooters too win, while flight sims are less friendly as looking up and down is so important. While it's true that most people who upgrade to this, or any screen with a similar res, will likely have had the same or similar vertical res as their last monitor, so nothing gained, nothing lost, but the wide 3400 res just makes you want a similar increase but in height, as well.

Curved is not a gimmick, at least with monitors it's not. Unlike a TV, you're sitting so close that it really is enveloping. This Acer has a fairly gentle curve ratio of 2000R. It works, I loved it. It's also quite a boon to basic desktop work as you can have around three full sized windows open at any time and only have to move your eyes a little to get a good look rather than having to crane your neck to read.

Acer resurrects its Predator range every few years, and it's coming on strong with several products slated for release this year. That's the quandary. Today, this XR341CK supports up to 75Hz refresh, and supports Adaptive-sync and FreeSync. About the time you read this, a G-Sync X34 model (also Adaptive-sync) with a 100Hz refresh will also be on sale. We've almost given

Curved is not a gimmick, at least with monitors it's not. Unlike a TV, you're sitting so close that it really is enveloping

up hope of ever seeing a single panel that supports both Free- and G-sync, politics being the reason for that, so we need to make tough choices. I came that close to buying this for myself, it really is outstanding, but waiting just a little longer is wise if you plan on using a new monitor for several years, as things are changing so fast. For those who can afford to upgrade more frequently, hell, jump in with this, you won't be disappointed. **BEN MANSILL**

- Strong in all tech specs
- Decent vertical res
- Stand doesn't tax your desk space

- 75Hz is nice, 100Hz would be better
- No G-Sync

## VERDICT:

If you can afford this monster, you definitely won't be disappointed

9



## HEADSET

# Plantronics Rig 500

Snap together sounds

PRICE \$99.95  
plantronics.com.au

When Plantronics launched the RIG brand a few years ago they hit upon the right mix of prestige features and price point. With the new Rig 500, Plantronics has once again hit that sweet spot, albeit in a different manner. The Rig 500 headset is built for both value and comfort without compromising excellent stereo performance. Each of the ear cups sports a crisp 40mm driver that delivers solid sound from bass through treble with a small amount of accentuation on the lower register and the memory foam cushions don't turn your ears into hideous sweat monsters within minutes. The use of cloth rather than vinyl or some kind of plush fabric to cover the cushions is a definite plus in our books. The fold up boom mic offers good clarity for skype and game chat, but more importantly it is set to mute

when flipped up so won't capture any noise when not needed. It would be nice to be able to remove the mic, but that's little more than a petty gripe.

The most impressive feature of the Rig 500 is the modular design that allows users to choose from three different heights for the ear cups, which in turn affect the tightness of the band and head strap. More aftermarket modular options will also be available soon. We're not sure of the specifics as yet but we assume that the accessories will be based around branded or themed head bands. The result is an extremely comfortable, very light headset that offers excellent stereo performance for the price. **DANIEL WILKS PC**



- Great modular design
- Light
- Very Comfortable

- Plastic components
- A little bassy

## VERDICT:

An excellent, lightweight and comfortable headset that should suit anyone on a budget

9

## MOUSE

# Roccat Kova

Left doesn't mean sinister

PRICE \$109.95  
www.roccat.org

Ambidextrous mice are a great idea, but all too often there are so many compromises in design to make the mouse usable for either hand that they become too bare bones for all but the most basic uses. This isn't a problem with the new Roccat Kova, a redesign of a popular and successful line of mice available in different forms since 2010 or so. Rather than taking a bare bones approach to symmetry, Roccat has instead created a fully featured mouse with enough buttons for any FPS or action game. The mouse features three side buttons on each side in addition to the left and right buttons and a clickable scroll wheel. Two of the side buttons under the thumb whilst the third sits to the side of the left and right buttons to be used by the fore or middle fingers. It's a fine and easily accessed suite of buttons but thanks to the rear thumb buttons working as a shift key if you



hold them down, each button can have a second purpose. Under the hood sits a mice 3500 DPI optical sensor that can be boosted to 7000 DPI via hardware acceleration.

Heaps of buttons mean nothing if a mouse isn't comfortable, but thankfully the shape of the Kova sits very comfortably in most hands. It takes a little getting used to the button placement and use of shift keys, but after a little practise there is a lot of functionality available at your fingertips.

**DANIEL WILKS PC**



- Fully ambidextrous
- Comfortable
- Heaps of buttons

- Slight learning curve

Comfortable in either hand and featuring enough buttons for most uses, the Kova brings functionality to ambidexterity

8

# MENAGERIE

Say hello to Skylake. It's not a huge leap up from the last gen, but it is slightly faster for the same price, so it's time to install it where applicable.

## BUDGET

The perfect entry-level gaming PC

### CPU

**AMD FX-4300 Quad Core 3.8GHz 4 Core Black Edt.**

**\$145** [www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)

We're sticking with AMD's budget beauty.



### MOBO

**ASRock 980DE3/U3S3 AM3+**

**\$69** [www.asrock.com.au](http://www.asrock.com.au)

Our CPU needs a new ASRock home.



### RAM

**GelL 8GB Kit DDR3 Evo Veloce C9 1600MHz**

**\$85** [www.gel.com.tw](http://www.gel.com.tw)

In with the cheapest we can find



### VIDEO

**PowerColor R9 380 PCS+ 4GB**

**\$349** [www.sapphiretech.com](http://www.sapphiretech.com)

AMD's new 960 killer



### POWER

**Cooler Master Thunder 500W**

**\$66** [www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)

The budget beast doesn't need a lot of juice



### SOUND

**Sennheiser HD201 + ASUS Xonar DG**

**\$38 + \$33** [www.sennheiser.com](http://www.sennheiser.com)

Headphones plus soundcard – yes!



### OPTICAL

**Lite-on DVD-RW**

**\$49** [www.us.liteonit.com](http://www.us.liteonit.com)

We'd happily retire the drive, but some of you guys still believe in physical media.



### STORAGE

**Toshiba DTO1ACA050 500GB HDD**

**\$59** [www.toshiba.com.au](http://www.toshiba.com.au)

Half a Terabyte should handle everything.



### DISPLAY

**Samsung 24" S24D300H**

**\$189** [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)

Crystal clear 1920 x 1080 res gaming



### CASE

**BitFenix Shinobi**

**\$95** [www.bitfenix.com](http://www.bitfenix.com)

Nice for the price. This is the little brother of the case used in our Performance build.



### KEYBOARD

**Tt eSPORTS Challenger**

**\$49** [www.thermaltake.com.au](http://www.thermaltake.com.au)

Built for PC gamers. Macros, shortcuts, the lot.



### MOUSE

**Gigabyte M6900**

**\$26** [www.gigabyte.com.au](http://www.gigabyte.com.au)

A sensor resolution of 3200DPI will make your headshots count.



**TOTAL: \$1,232**

## PERFORMANCE

Most bells and whistles, without breaking the bank

### CPU

**Intel 5th Generation Core i5-6600K + Noctua NH-D15**

**\$350 + \$115** [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)



### MOBO

**ASUS Z170 Pro Gaming**

**\$270** [www.asus.com.au](http://www.asus.com.au)

Our fave affordable Z170 board



### RAM

**GelL 16GB DDR4 2400MHz**

**\$175** [www.gel.com.tw](http://www.gel.com.tw)

Sweet, sweet DDR4.



### VIDEO

**Galaxy GTX970-4GD5**

**\$499** [www.galaxytechus.com](http://www.galaxytechus.com)

NVIDIA's mid-range card is perfect



### POWER

**Corsair VS650**

**\$85** [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)

This affordable PSU delivers a clean and reliable source of energy.



### SOUND

**Audio Technica ATH-A500X w/ASUS Xonar DG**

**\$159 + \$33** [www.audio-technica.com](http://www.audio-technica.com)



### OPTICAL

**Lite-on DVD-RW**

**\$49** [www.us.liteonit.com](http://www.us.liteonit.com)

This is the one bit of kit that stays the same between most of our machines.



### STORAGE

**W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung 850 EVO 250GB**

**\$109 + \$165** [www.wdc.com / www.samsung.com.au](http://www.wdc.com / www.samsung.com.au)



### DISPLAY

**BenQ XL2411T**

**\$379** [www.benq.com.au](http://www.benq.com.au)

BenQ's 24-inch not only looks great, it'll also save your eyesight with a 144Hz refresh rate.



### CASE

**Fractal Design Define R5**

**\$159** [www.fractal-design.com](http://www.fractal-design.com)

Our new favourite mid-tower.



### KEYBOARD

**Logitech G710+**

**\$139** [www.thermaltake.com.au](http://www.thermaltake.com.au)

Logi's new mechanical board is one for them to beat.



### MOUSE

**Logitech G502 Proteus**

**\$59** [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

Deadly accurate and super comfortable.



**TOTAL: \$2,745**

## PREMIUM

Crank everything to Ultra, including your credit limit

### CPU

**Intel 6th Generation Core i7-6700K + Corsair H110i GT Water Cooling Kit**

**\$469 + \$169** [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)



### MOBO

**Gigabyte Z170X-Gaming 7**

**\$369** [www.gigabyte.com.au](http://www.gigabyte.com.au)

Skylake boards cost a tad more, tis fact.



### RAM

**G.Skill DDR4-3200 16GB Dual Channel Ripjaws**

**\$209** [www.gskill.com](http://www.gskill.com)

3200MHz for our Premium PC



### VIDEO

**2 X Gigabyte GeForce GTX 980 Ti 6GB**

**\$2040** [www.gigabyte.com.au](http://www.gigabyte.com.au)

Welcome to the world of Ultra High Detail.



### POWER

**Corsair HX1000i**

**\$299** [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)

A high end PSU to ensure stable overlocks.



### SOUND

**Audio Technica ATH-ADG1 headphones**

**\$249** [www.audio-technica.com](http://www.audio-technica.com)

We've ditched the soundcard



### OPTICAL

**Pioneer Optical Disc Drive (ODD) Internal Blu-ray Combo Drive**

**\$118** [www.pioneer.com.au](http://www.pioneer.com.au)



### STORAGE

**W.D. Caviar Black 1TB + Samsung SSD 850 EVO 500GB**

**\$109 + \$305** [www.wdc.com / www.samsung.com.au](http://www.wdc.com / www.samsung.com.au)



### DISPLAY

**ASUS PB287Q 28" 4K display**

**\$739** [www.asus.com.au](http://www.asus.com.au)

4K is now a reality



### CASE

**NZXT Switch 810 Full Tower**

**\$185** [www.nzxt.com](http://www.nzxt.com)

It's big, it's beautiful, and it's also nice and quiet.



### KEYBOARD

**Corsair K70 RGB**

**\$235** [www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)

This is PCPP's favourite keyboard, case closed.



### MOUSE

**Logitech G502 Proteus**

**\$69** [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

Deadly accurate and super comfortable.



**TOTAL: \$5,564**

RT-AC87U Red  
Wireless Gigabit Router





# THE BEAST

When overkill is barely enough...



## CPU

**Intel 6th Generation Core i7 6700K  
+ XSPC RayStorm D5 RX240 V3  
Water Cooling Kit**

**\$469 + \$587**

[www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)

[www.pccasegear.com.au](http://www.pccasegear.com.au)



## HEADPHONES + SOUND CARD

**Audio Technica ATH-ADG1  
headphones**

**\$249**

[www.audio-technica.com](http://www.audio-technica.com)

Plug these into the Marantz amp for maximum sound quality.



## MOBO

**MSI Z170A XPower  
Gaming Titanium Edition**

**\$499** [www.msi.com](http://www.msi.com)

Sexy, silver and super fast.



## STORAGE

**2 x Samsung SSD 850  
PRO 2TB, 2 x WD 1TB  
Velociraptor**

**\$1000 + \$1000**

[www.wdc.com](http://www.wdc.com)

[www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)



## RAM

**G.Skill DDR4-3200  
16GB Dual Channel  
Ripjaws**

**\$209** [www.gskill.com](http://www.gskill.com)

3200MHz is good for the Beast too.



## DISPLAY

**Epson TW9200W**

**\$3800**

[www.epson.com.au](http://www.epson.com.au)

Beautiful 1920 x 1080 gaming. Unfortunately you won't be able to do 3D gaming at anything higher than 720p due to the limitations of HDMI 1.4.



## VIDEO

**2 x MSI GTX 980 Ti  
Lightning SE**

**\$2458** [www.msi.com](http://www.msi.com)

The Lightning is faster than a Titan. True.



## CASE

**Cooler Master Cosmos II  
Ultra Tower**

**\$379**

[www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)

It's big, it's beautiful, and it's also nice and quiet. The compartmentalised interior ensures everything runs ice-cool.



## POWER

**Silverstone  
1500wST1500 Strider**

**\$315** [www.silverstone.com](http://www.silverstone.com)

1500W should be plenty for the three GPUs running alongside an overclocked CPU, as well as the storage within.



## INPUT DEVICES

**SteelSeries Sensei RAW optical +  
Xbox 360 USB Wireless Dongle +  
Xbox 360 wireless controller**

**\$69 + \$40 + \$40**

[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



## KEYBOARD

**Corsair K70 RGB**

**\$235**

[www.corsair.com](http://www.corsair.com)

This is PCPP's favourite keyboard, case closed.



## STEERING WHEEL

**Fanatec ClubSport Wheel  
base, Formula Carbon and  
CSP v2 Pedals**

**\$589 + \$239 + \$329** [www.fanatec.de](http://www.fanatec.de)

There's nothing better than "Germengineering" to deliver the most precise force feedback around.



## SPEAKERS

**Paradigm Cinema 110 with dual  
subwoofers and Paradigm  
monitor center channel  
+ Marantz SR5009 amp**

**\$3299**

[www.eastwoodhifi.com.au](http://www.eastwoodhifi.com.au)



## JOYSTICK

**Logitech G940**

**\$385**

[www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)

This Force Feedback set is getting harder to find, but it's still the finest flight controller around.



## OPTICAL

**Pioneer Optical Disc Drive  
(ODD) Internal Blu-ray  
Combo Drive**

**\$118** [www.pioneer.com.au](http://www.pioneer.com.au)

Putting in a Blu-ray drive allows it to double as a powerful media box.



## COCKPIT

**Obutto oZone with Buttkicker  
gamer 2 and TrackIR 5 Pro**

**\$1100**

You're going to need somewhere to mount your whe joystick, and the Obutto frame is a favourite of ours.



**TOTAL: \$17,408**

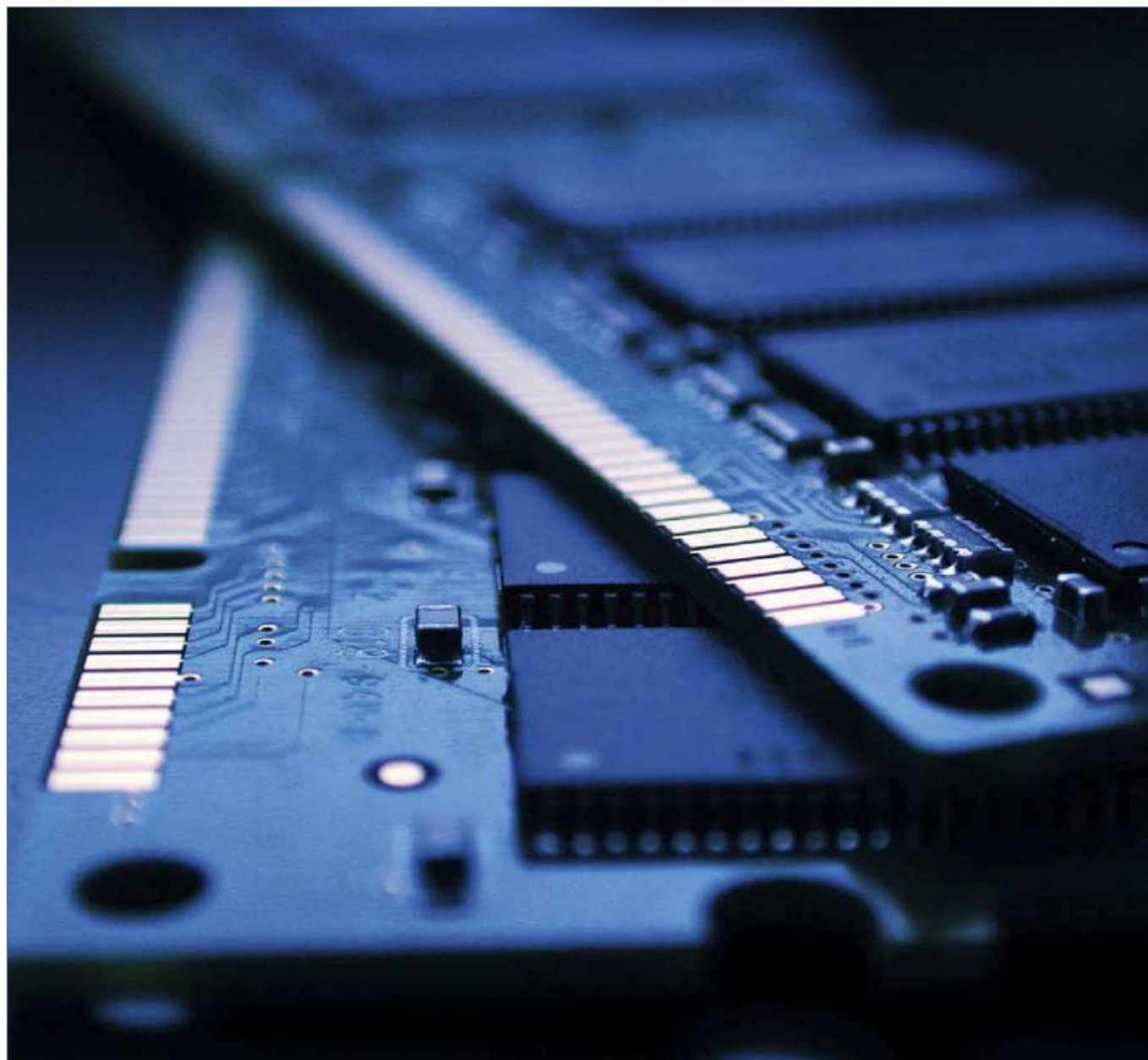
Dual-band data rate of 2334Mbit/s  
Ultra-fast 802.11ac Wi-Fi router  
Smooth 4K/UHD video playback

**ASUS**  
No.1 in Quality & Services  
- The Wall Street Journal Asia

## How Things Work

# RAM MAN

**ASHLEY MCKINNON** doesn't have spring loaded legs





**W**e've all been told that one of the quickest and easiest ways to increase your computer's performance is to add more RAM (Random Access Memory). This can be true – especially these days with resource hungry Operating Systems and ever increasingly complex programs. But what exactly is RAM, and how does it work.

Computer memory has one task – storing information as either a 0 or a 1 – it really is that simple. Think of your computer memory as a table with lots of paper cups on it. These cups represent the computer memory cells and can either be empty (0) or full (1). The computer constantly scans all these cups (cells) and can see if they are full or empty. The computer can then interpret all these 0's and 1's into data which tells the computer what and how to do things.

Memory cells however do leak, and going off our analogy this would mean each paper cup has a small hole in the bottom which slowly (in computer terms) leaks. This leaking is kept under control by the computer continuously interrogating the memory cells and replenishing them when needed – again off our analogy this would be like each cup having its content poured out then poured back in again. Just to be clear – the memory cells themselves don't hold any information – just a charge – so they can be either empty (no charge) (0) or full (charged) (1).

The memory itself is made from silicon wafer, into which the memory cells are etched. They are produced in a grid like formation, lined up in rows and columns. The intersection of a row and column represents the memory address – just like a street address. Anyone who's experienced the dreaded Windows blue screen of death will be familiar with what a memory address looks like. All this takes place at the microscopic level so don't try breaking open one of your old RAM modules to try and see this.

Now that we've discussed what makes up the memory modules and how they basically function let's delve a little deeper into how they work, where we've come from and where we are going.

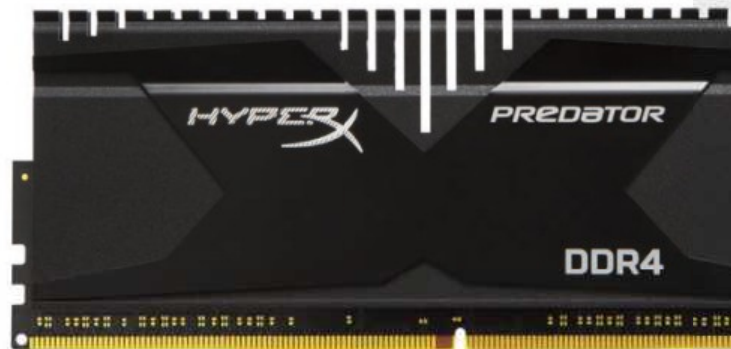
In the 1990's as computers started to get faster and more complex we began to see the use of Synchronous Dynamic Random Access Memory (SDRAM),

which allowed the computer memory to synchronise which other computer components. This let processes queue up while waiting for another process to finish. Pretty advanced for its day but it had a limitation in that the memory could only accept one command per cycle. This was called Single Data Rate (SDR) and by the end of the 1990's SDR was becoming a bottleneck as other PC components were getting faster and faster.

Engineers came to the rescue with Double Data Rate (DDR) which allowed for two commands per cycle, basically doubling the memory's speed capability overnight. DDR also brought in lower clock rates (between 100 and 200 Mhz) as well as using lower voltage. At this point – computer memory was able to transfer at a rate of 400 MT/s (Mega Transfers per Second). In terms of real world data transfer, this represented a speed of up to 3.2GB/s (Gigabytes per second). The largest DDR size available at this time was 1GB.

As technology started to explode in the years following 2000, DDR started to become too slow and in 2003 DDR2 was announced. The internal clock speed of DDR2 sped up to 200-533MHz while the voltage needed decreased. DDR2 effectively runs at more than twice the speed of the original DDR clocking in at rates up to 1066 MT/s. The maximum storage limit for a DDR2 module was 4GB while the maximum data transfer rate was 6.4GB/s. The drawback with DDR2 as well as all subsequent DDR technologies is that they aren't backward or forward compatible – meaning they can't be mixed. Moving from DDR to DDR2 meant a system upgrade. They may look physically similar but they do run at different clock speeds, and if you look very closely you will notice the boards are notched differently meaning they won't even plug into a different DDR slot.

The year 2007 quenched the thirst for even more speed with the introduction of DDR3. The internal clock was halved giving 400-1066MHz and again the voltage was decreased even further to 1.5 volts. And once again, effective speed doubled over the previous DDR rate with a maximum throughput of 2166MT/s. Real world data transfer rate more than doubled with up to 14.9GB/s. With the DDR3 up to 128GB became available as a module size.



Interestingly, high end graphics was one of the biggest drivers behind DDR3 as more complex and detailed graphics and games started to be developed.

DDR3 is the pseudo standard these days if you are looking for computer memory, but early 2014 saw the first implementations of DDR4 – which coincided with the release of the Intel Haswell-E processor which required DDR4 to run. Samsung had already made a prototype of a DDR4 module as far back as 2011 but it took some time for the technology to reach market.

DDR4 (with a clock speed between 800 and 1600 MHz) has a theoretical maximum module size of 512GB and a maximum data transfer rate of 25.6GB/s – though it will take some time (may not happen at all) before we see anything approaching that size. At time of writing the largest DDR4 module available is 128GB, with a data transfer rate of up to 17GB/s. This falls

**DDR4 hasn't quite reached the doubling of speed over DDR3 that developers expected**

## ■ The year 2007 quenched the thirst for even more speed with the introduction of DDR3 ■

short of the expected doubling in speed from the previous DDR technology (DDR3). The potential is there, it's just not finding the market share the manufacturers were expecting.

Our need for faster memory seems to have hit a bit of a plateau as our focus now has shifted more towards mobile technology which utilises smaller, cheaper components with lower voltage requirements.

No plans for DDR5 have been made official yet and probably won't until DDR4 finds favour and market acceptance. **PC**

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Welcome to the PCPP competitions page! With the office positively overflowing in PC gaming goodies, it's become so difficult to do our ridiculously awesome jobs that we decided to pass the savings onto you. And by savings, we mean free stuff. Games, collectibles, swag, and all kinds of media that screams PC gaming. Or perhaps those are the screams of the intern trapped under the boxes of giveaways. Only one way to save them: Head to [www.pcpowerplay.com.au](http://www.pcpowerplay.com.au) to enter!

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▶ *Who is the best Doctor Who companion, and why?*

**10**

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**5**

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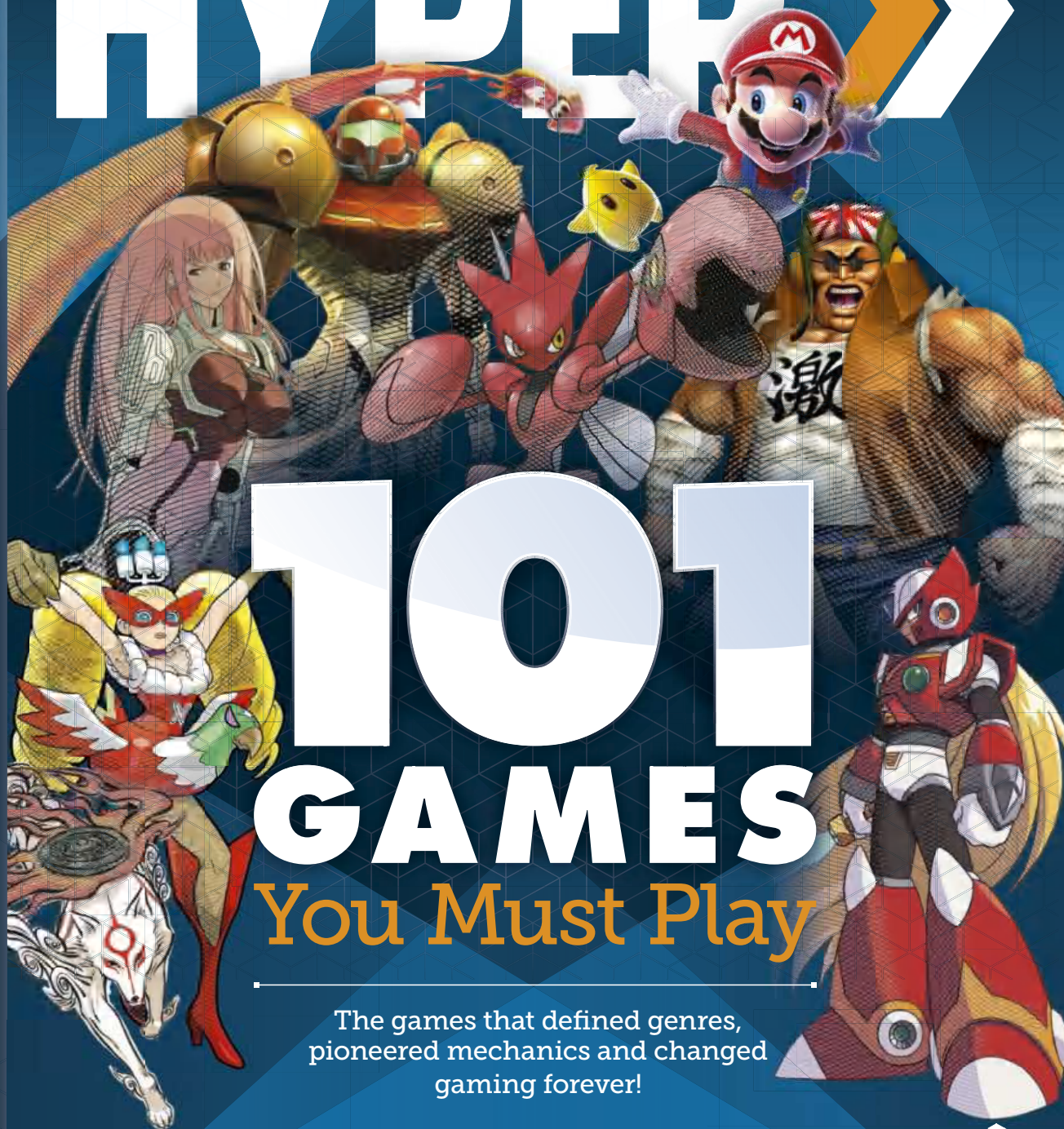
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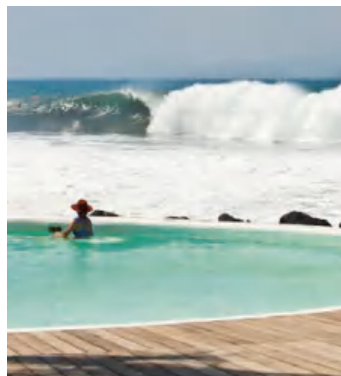
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# The Great Escape

JOSHUA LUNDBERG once ran away from his demons

It's safe to say mental health is rapidly becoming less of a taboo in society. While this may not be the case for discrimination in the workplace and alienation socially, it's certainly made huge strides in the last five years alone through the bravery of many people and the successes of organisations like Beyond Blue.

As someone who lives with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, general anxiety and depression, I've spent much of my life struggling with the balance of anxiety and the goings-on in life, and that's regularly affected my relationship with games.

As I've mentioned a number of times, I was a bit of a late bloomer on the gaming front; I dabbled in PC games like SkyRoads and Wacky Wheels. I didn't get absorbed by games until I was given a PlayStation as a gift in 1999. As I entered adolescence and my tendency to avoid confrontation of my disorder grew, games became quite the crutch; it's hard to think about life and the world when you're absorbed in a game. As a pastime they were an escape, a continuation of avoidance.

This isn't to say gaming wasn't immediately a liberating, exhilarating hobby. I was passionate about experiencing things I would never experience in real life through the medium. The issue was it was through the lens of avoidance and escape – a negative escape.

If you're unfamiliar with how OCD works, it's not the Monk nonsense. Yes, people are tortured by either intermittent or almost-constant compulsions to act out 'rituals', but the reasons why are infinitely more interesting and complex. I can't speak as an authority on the various manifestations of OCD, but I can discuss the exhausting, confusing and unrelenting assault on the mind that 'intrusive thoughts' can be, and why videogames make a good mechanism for escape from them.

It's best to speak with a qualified practitioner when discussing these things, but essentially intrusive thoughts are morbid, disturbing thoughts that pass through the mind of a person with OCD as though those thoughts are their own. They can range from visions of horrible incidents that 'will occur' if the inflicted person does not, say, flick a light switch eight times, to thoughts that if they hold their nephew they'll throw them off a balcony.

The taboo with OCD in particular comes

from the fact that an exploration of what's happening with someone who has the disorder reveals horrendously disturbing information. The thing is, they don't actually think those things. It's more akin to picking up on an unwanted radio signal that prevents you from hearing things relevant to you.

So, taking this into account, it's easy to see how videogames can provide an arena where a person can exercise complete control. It's not a coincidence that the two genres I fell in love with instantly, and almost-exclusively, were First-Person Shooters and Real-Time Strategy games; two genres with limited chaos and a remarkable sense of player agency.

More common is depression. Most people reading this will have, or will at some point, experience it. It sucks. I doubt I need to go into any explanation, but let's just cover off the fact it isn't just being 'bummed out'.

During depressive periods, people will often withdraw from socialising and simplify

■ If you're unfamiliar with how OCD works, it's not the Monk nonsense ■

their lives to the absolute basics – for any number of reasons, but often because anything else is simply too much to deal with.

Games are a popular safe haven for people suffering depression, in my experience. They're reliable, don't talk back and - if you feel a need for human connection – you can interact anonymously online with people you'll likely make no significant connection with. Perfect!

What I'm about to write about isn't easy. It's an extraordinary challenge, and beyond that it is subjectively insurmountable.

Games as a means for avoidance are, in my experience and opinion, not healthy. It is vitally important that you confront your mental health issues and work to manage them – note I say manage, because many are lifelong issues and impossible to cure. It's likely everyone will fail time and time again before finding successful management techniques for their mental health. You can't judge the process of others from the outside, because it almost certainly appears irrational or counter-productive. When people find


their way, however, their lives will change long-term, if not forever, and they'll be stronger for it.

What I have discovered in the past few of years is I no longer use videogames as a crutch. I'm not sure when the transition happened, probably over a long period of time, but when discussing the amount of time spent playing videogames a mental health professional asked me, "why are you playing them?"

It's a charged question; some people believe videogames can make you depressed, aggressive or anxious – that they're the cause, not the mechanism for escape. Some people just don't understand the appeal. Fortunately that wasn't the case this time.

I took some time to think about my response before saying, "they've become an outlet for release, but where I used to play them for five, six, ten hours at a time to avoid other matters, I now play only for as long as I really want to. I don't need to play." Note that neither of us interpreted the word 'need' here as being related to addiction. That's a kettle of fish I'm not willing to tackle.

The change may seem semantic, but in terms of how games made me feel the response was positive. Where once I felt guilty for wasting time and avoiding problems, I felt joy, stress release and calm. When dealing with any mental health issue, I think it's important to think about any activity and how it impacts on you; work, who you spend time with, how much you drink, what drugs you do - these all impact on your state of mind. I'm no angel. Not by a long shot. I've focused so much on work this year I've done virtually no exercise, and that's a big no-no on the mental health front.

If you do have to manage complications with your mental health, it's good to be aware that - as I touched on earlier - there's no consensus on how games impact our psychology. It's my opinion this is because everyone is different. Anything is bad for you without moderation, but when you feel a genuine, intense passion for videogaming it can be hard to separate negative escapism from positive relaxation. If you work with a mental health professional to manage your issues it would undoubtedly be a good topic to bring up. Tell them about your favourite games and how they make you feel and be honest about why you play them - you never know, it could contribute positively to your mental health and improve your relationship with gaming. 





Do not conform any longer  
to the pattern of this world

Please don't stare

is running on my head?

One road

No choice

When I'm hidden  
their looks vanish

and shadows embrace me.

Place of the deep

Vegetation

I fail

any time I try

2^4 2^3 2^2 2^1 2^0

=8 =8 =14-12 14-10 14-8

Why do they follow me?

Why?

If I could  
stay here...

If I could  
leave this place...

In the heart  
of fear

These images are from *Actual Sunlight* and *Sym*, two games that deal with depression and social anxiety, respectively. Both are available on Steam.







# Gears of Phwoar

NATHAN DAVIES is a brother in arms

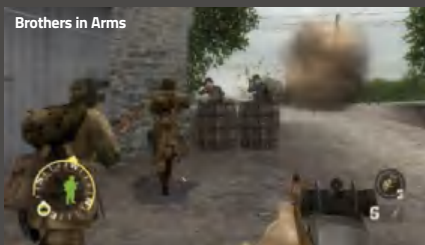
Gearbox is one of the most well recognized game developers mainly known for specializing in shooters. There are not many who don't hear this name and automatically associate it with series like Borderlands and the upcoming Battleborn. It wasn't always this way, as Gearbox used to be known for making more realistic games. So how did Gearbox get from where it was to where it is now?

Gearbox was first founded in 1999 by five former members of the now defunct studio, Rebel Boat Rocket. The company got its start by developing expansions for Valve studios Half-Life, and worked on every expansion and port in the Half-Life series, before Half-Life 2. They also worked on the Counter Strike series, and then proceeded to branch out to work with other game companies porting their console games to PC.

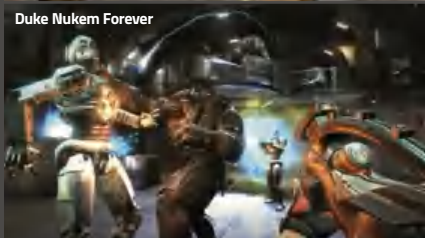
After 5-years of working on other company's properties, Gearbox released their first original game. Brothers in Arms, released in 2005, garnered high sales and critical acclaim, as people fell in love with the World War 2 FPS. After the success of the first game, the company proceeded to continue the series launching numerous sequels.

With Brothers in Arms and its sequels gaining success, Gearbox decided to work on another game. Released in 2009 Gearbox created Borderlands game series loved far and wide for its humour, cell shaded art design, and outstanding FPS gameplay. This game was a massive success with many gamers falling in love with every aspect of Borderlands, from the world of Pandora to the insane characters. Borderlands and its expansions all saw massive success in the game market.

The following year saw some major disappointment at Gearbox. In 2010 Gearbox announced that they had acquired the rights to the Duke Nukem franchise and were working with 3D Realms to finish Duke Nukem Forever. The game released to harsh criticism due to the rushed and unfinished state of the game. Randy Pitchford CEO of Gearbox has actually defended the game in the past. In an interview with Eurogamer he stated "With Duke there were a lot of things. There were 15 years of expectation. So the expectation gap was impossible. The game had been in development for 15 years.



Brothers in Arms



Duke Nukem Forever



Borderlands



Aliens: Colonial Marines

## After the disastrous release of Colonial Marines, Gearbox released Borderlands: the Pre-Sequel

Some of the content is from 2006. That's judged harshly I guess."

Following the release of Duke Nukem Forever, Gearbox released a game that was far less disappointing for gamers. Borderlands 2 hit shelves in 2012 and was considered better than the first, providing people with even more of what made the original game popular, with even more humour and violence as well as the addition of more extensive skill trees and a wide range of weapon customization. Finally Borderlands 2 introduced gamers to one of the most popular villains of all time, Handsome Jack. Despite the massive success of Borderlands 2, Gearbox's reputation would soon become extremely damaged and mired in controversy.

In 2008 Gearbox announced a partnership with Sega to create Aliens: Colonial Marines and release the game in 2013, this partnership however would become the centre of much controversy. In February 2013 an anonymous source informed video game website, Destuctoid, that Gearbox had been taking people and resources from the Aliens game, and putting them to work on other titles while collecting full payment from Sega for working on the project. This then led to Sega to temporarily seize the development of

the game and also led to a number of employees at Gearbox losing their jobs.

The game was finally released in an unfinished and hugely disappointing state, perhaps due to the lack of resources given to the project, the relative inexperience of the third party developer some of the work was outsourced to, the firm release deadline or even the meddling by SEGA. Whatever the case, the result was a class action lawsuit that was filed against both Gearbox and Sega in 2013, under the accusation that they falsely advertised Aliens: Colonial Marines, by showing demos at trade shows that did not represent the final product.

After the disastrous release of Colonial Marines, Gearbox released Borderlands: the Pre-Sequel. The game was developed by 2K Australia and went on to gain the same success as the previous two instalments of the franchise. Gearbox also teamed up with Telltale games to produce a series of narrative adventure games similar to The Walking Dead, called Tales of the Borderlands. These games have gone on to gain critical acclaim of their own, strengthening the Borderlands franchise.

Now on the verge of the release of their newest game Battleborn, it seems that the company is promising more of what made the Borderlands series so popular. **PC**

# Story Time

DANIEL WILKS has reserved the best seat by the fire

At PAX this year I hosted a panel titled, “Tell Me a Story and I’ll Love You Forever”. It was a flowery title, to be sure, but it really does reflect how I feel about stories. I am a collector of many things – books, comics, movies, minerals, puppets, recipes... the list goes on – but if there’s one thing that unifies most of my collecting it is stories. I inhale plots, character arcs and developments. Hearing a new story excites me in a way few other things do. I’m a junkie and stories are my drug of choice.

The idea behind the panel was to look at the way stories emerge from games rather than how stories are told in games. To be wanky and technical, I wanted to talk about emergent storytelling in videogames. I broke the ways these stories are told into four relatively loose categories – the stories people bring to games, the stories people create in games, the stories people create using games and the stories people bring from games. With me on the panel were Mateusz Tomaszewicz, Quest Writer for *The Witcher 2: Assassins of Kings* and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, YouTuber and streamer ZiggyD, Dan Hindes, former PCPP editor and current developer of *Wildfire* and James O’Connor, freelancer and Master’s candidate who wrote his thesis on emergent storytelling in games.

By my definition, stories people bring to games are things like deep character creation – creating detailed histories and personalities for characters so you essentially tell you character’s story in a game. That was my bag. Stories people create in games are twofold. Mateusz talked about watching YouTube videos of people taking totally unexpected, unscripted approaches to solving quests he had designed and ZiggyD talked about how he creates stories in his streams to keep the audience entertained, effectively adding to the mythology of the game he is playing at the time. Both ZiggyD and Dan Hindes talked about making stories with games. Before going into game development, Dan created a series of YouTube videos detailing the many and varied ways he could use game mechanics to kill specific characters from *Deus Ex* and *Dishonored*, and now that he’s creating a game he’s releasing short Vines or GIFs showing emergent gameplay coming from the new mechanics he’s coded into *Wildfire*, essentially



people came together to celebrate their hobby and seemed more than willing to support anyone else in attendance

creating buzz for the game with a series of short slapstick vignettes. ZiggyD talked about setting personal challenges in games so he could use the game mechanics to tell a story and keep his audience entertained. James added an academic viewpoint to the proceedings. I had a great time, and the audience seemed to enjoy it as well. That’s always a plus.

Although not exactly balanced in terms of gender, the panel was definitely balanced in terms of viewpoint and it definitely engendered some interesting discussion, but what was most interesting to me was what happened when we threw to the audience in the last 15 minutes of the panel. Before we began the panel proper, I charged the audience with a bit of homework. I asked them to have a think about their favourite gaming anecdotes to share after we’d finished pontificating on the panel. My reasons for asking were two fold; the end of the panel was a discussion of the stories people brought from games - anecdotes are the most common form of these stories – and I thought it would be entertaining.

It was entertaining, but what I didn’t expect was how many people were so eager

to share their stories with people they had never met. Anecdotes are usually things you share with friends, but in the atmosphere of PAX and the camaraderie that goes with it, the usual inhibitions went by the wayside and people were all too willing to stand up and tell sometimes rambling tales of their adventures in games, trusting that not only would everyone in attendance find them amusing but that they would be accepting of these personal stories. It was a wonderful thing to witness.

Telling stories in public is something that is fraught with anxiety. They make you the centre of attention and subject your words and manner of speaking to criticism. I’m used to my words being open to criticism. When you’ve worked in the media for any length of time you get used to the scrutiny, but even so the nerves never truly go away. It’s telling of how strong, and ultimately cohesive the gaming community is that the PAX experience not only encourages but embraces this idea of sharing stories. Even the least of stories was met with laughter and applause, the audience willing to overlook flaws in style or substance that would be picked apart any other time.

Over the last few years there has been something of a divide in the gaming community. You know the divide I’m talking about. This divide, however, only really seems to be online. At last year’s PAX there was only one disruptive, antagonistic question asked at any panel I was in or attended. This year I didn’t see or even hear about any at all. It seems to me as though, when you get a big group of gamers together in one place they instinctively seek out their similarities and share their common loves rather than define what sets them apart. Whether this is due to the inherent anonymity of the online space, the human instinct to form like-minded tribes or just the general happy vibe of PAX I’ll leave to the sociologists. Whatever the case, people came together to celebrate their hobby and seemed more than willing to support anyone else in attendance. For someone who often gets accused of being rather jaded, this is something guaranteed to put a smile on my face.

ZiggyD filmed the panel, so we should have a link to it on [pcpowerplay.com.au](http://pcpowerplay.com.au) if you’re keen to have a watch. **PC**







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